



Thomas Kaplan and his «Leiden Collection» come out of the shadows at the Louvre Museum

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When one thinks of the greatest private art collectors, the first one we usually mention would be the media magnate David Geffen, followed by the American Eli Broad, then Philip Niarchos from Greece, followed by the Nahmad brothers (from the Principality of Monaco) coming in at number four and five, and finally François Pinault from France being sixth on this list. Among them, there are many examples that show the strong bond established between American collectors and French museums.

A recent example of the American couple Spencer and Marlene Hays is a symbolic one. In November of 2016 the couple, who have a collection of over 600 pieces of art from the 19th and 20th century donated 187 pieces (with an estimated value of 173 million dollars) to the Orsay Museum, which is widely known for displaying paintings from the 19th century.

There is no reference to Thomas Kaplan on this list however. So who is this American billionaire and art collector, who will be displaying his collection at the Louvre Museum from February 22nd to May 22nd?

Thomas Kaplan: an art collector not very well-known by the general public

Some collectors have extensive media coverage whenever they acquire a new piece or when it comes to the importance and worth of their collection. Thomas Kaplan however, has chosen to be discreet. He is primarily known as the president of the Electrum Group LLC, a company that manages private investments on the stock market and in private companies, although he's also an American billionaire, a philanthropist, and an art collector.

Yet the collection of Thomas and his wife Daphne Recanati Kaplan is fascinating. Always referring to their estate as the «Leiden Collection,» (referring to the birth town of Rembrandt) their pieces have been anonymously released in over forty Museums, including the Metropolitan Museum and the Getty. The collector and his wife believe in public sharing, having no intent to create a private Museum between the four walls of their home. They have instead decided to display their pieces in public facilities, and only ever mention them as part of the «Leiden Collection.»

Currently the Kaplans own 250 works of art, including eleven paintings and nine drawings from the brilliant Rembrandt. The exhibition at the Louvre Museum provides an opportunity for the couple to see, for the first time, their pieces gathered in one place, allowing Thomas Kaplan to reaffirm that the collection «does not include any major error,» something he already stated in March of 2016. Thus, in 2017, in Paris, the most important private collection dedicated to Flemish art will come out of the shadows.

An exhibition that pays tribute to the Dutch golden age

Although the heart of the exhibition is made up of the eleven paintings and nine drawings of Rembrandt, the works of his peers, and fellow countrymen – that is, Jan Steen, Jan Lievens, Frans van Mieris and Gerard Dou (the couple acquired a dozen works by the latter) will also be displayed at that time. The displayed pieces will belong to two genres: portraits and scenes.

Among these masterpieces, will be «La Minerve» by Rembrandt, from a series of portraits depicting strong women and goddesses of mythology, the «Portrait of a Man in a Red Coat» by Rembrandt, the «Golden Age» by Jan Brueghel and the «Circle» by Pierre Paul Rubens. The entire Leiden collection has also been available online since January 23, 2017, on the Louvre Museum's website for any curious onlooker who would like to get a first-hand look at these Flemish masterpieces that will be displayed with this retrospective.

Thomas Kaplan: a life-saving collector for the French State

The sole exception in the collection would be the work known as «Eliezer and Rebecca at the Well» by Ferdinand Bol. In order to understand this particular case, we need to look into the history of this painting. In 2009, when Thomas Kaplan acquired the painting by Bol, he found out that he had outbid the Louvre Museum for the piece created by Rembrandt's student. He then decided to entrust the painting to the Louvre, an extraordinary condition for a museum who doesn't typically accept long term loans from private collections. Then the Kaplans decided to even take it a step further and donate the painting to the Louvre. Like the Hays couple, these American billionaires helped support France in their mission to acquire pieces of art, a service greatly needed.

Today, France has five ways to broaden its national collections. By acquiring pieces with public money, (using purchase credits) accepting pieces for payment in lieu of inheritance tax, using preemptive rights in public sales, asking companies to purchase on behalf of the public treasury and also by encouraging donations from collectors. Given the current state of France's public finances, this last choice is the most logical and collectors such as Thomas Kaplan are part of a renewal of French collections. He is also considering entrusting a Rembrandt to the Louvre of Abu-Dhabi at the next exhibition that will take place at the Louvre Annex in 2018. The people of France have been very appreciative of this and are thankful for his generosity.

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