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中国国家博物馆“伦勃朗和他的时代：美国某顿收藏馆藏品展”展品：

1. 《坐在维金纳琴边的年轻女子》，约翰内斯·维米尔
2. 《削羽毛笔的学者》，格里特·德奥
3. 《塞缪尔安菲齐宁像》，弗朗斯·哈尔斯
4. 《玩牌者》，扬·利文斯



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从伦勃朗到维米尔， 他收藏了一个荷兰黄金时代

文 / 薛卉

拥有 13 幅伦勃朗作品和 1 幅维米尔作品，却没有一个固定的私人收藏空间，莱顿收藏开拓了一种前卫另类的“收藏成功学”。

伦勃朗和他的时代

中国国家博物馆正在举办的“伦勃朗和他的时代：美国莱顿收藏馆藏作品展”中，维米尔（Johannes Vermeer）的《坐在维金纳琴边的年轻女子》成为重中之重。尺幅很小，这是维米尔一贯的风格，画面细腻、温情、明亮、有瞬时感，带着深深的 17 世纪荷兰黄金时代的印记，让人驻足。

维米尔是个充满神秘感和自带话题性的艺术家，一是有关他的记载的确不多，很多经历无从考证；二是目前能确认为维米尔真迹的作品不过 34 幅，大多收藏于全球国家级的博物馆和美术馆里。美国莱顿收藏的这幅，创作于 17 世纪 70 年代，是唯一一幅由私人收藏的维米尔作品。

了解 17 世纪的荷兰，绘画是最便捷和直观的入口。

1609 年尼德兰革命，是历史上第一次成功的资产阶级革命。在欧洲诸国还处于封建专制制度统治中时，荷兰共和国已成为当时欧洲最发达、最先进的国家。市民阶层兴起，他们喜欢用绘画来装点室内，艺术在那里开始摆脱宗教和宫廷的束缚，走向世俗生活。“在市镇厅和其他公共场所，在孤儿院和农舍，在贵族和市民的住宅里，总之，除了教堂以外，绘画作品无处不在。”当大多数学者将当时活跃的艺术品市场归结于“满足对美的渴望”时，荷兰历史学家赫伊津哈（Johan Huizinga）却指出这不是后来人把自己的审美观注入了当时荷兰人的脑子，在他看来，“更重要的是对万物实在性和重要性

不可动摇的信念，对生活的挚爱和对环境的兴趣”。17 世纪“荷兰画派”最大的特点就是现实性，或者说真实，又充满神秘的影射。

这一时期的荷兰绘画也因此成为收藏家们的热爱。2003 年，托马斯·卡普兰（Thomas S. Kaplan）和妻子达芙妮·莉卡纳第·卡普兰（Daphne Recanati Kaplan）共同成立了莱顿收藏（The Leiden Collection），是目前全球规模最大的荷兰黄金时代艺术作品私人收藏之一，拥有超过 250 幅该时期作品。除了这幅唯一的私人收藏的维米尔，最让他们引以为傲的，是伦勃朗的 11 幅油画和 2 幅素描作品，这也是国家级博物馆以外规模最大的伦勃朗作品集合。

伦勃朗无疑是那个时代的领袖，展览也是从他开始的。几幅典型的“伦勃朗风格”的肖像之外，3 幅初期的“五官感觉系列”与成熟时期风格差异很大，显得更为难得。《结石手术（触觉的寓言）》《三位乐师（听觉的寓言）》《失去知觉的病人（嗅觉的寓言）》这 3 幅都是木版油画，尺寸比 A4 纸还小，作于 1624 至 1625 年，此时的伦勃朗还不到 20 岁，尚未从家乡莱顿搬到阿姆斯特丹。其中《昏迷中的病人》是目前已知最早有伦勃朗亲笔签名的画作。这一系列人物表情夸张，有点讽刺画的意味，但已有笔法粗犷、笔触明显的伦勃朗风格雏形。不过相对程式化的色彩和光影运用，还是能看出这出自一个年轻人之手。

无论是在展览中还是对于莱顿收藏本身，伦勃朗的这十余幅作品都是最核心的，也是最吸引观众

目光的。不过要把它们放在整个辉煌的17世纪荷兰，更像是一个引子，去开启一个时代和一种新的“主义”，或者说起到定海神针的作用。

托马斯在接受本刊专访时，也一再强调“莱顿收藏并非孤立地展现伦勃朗的个人艺术成长轨迹，相反，它还将画家置于同时代艺术创作的更大语境中，形成对话”，这其中包括伦勃朗在阿姆斯特丹的老师彼得·拉斯特曼（Pieter Lastman）、乌特勒支卡拉瓦乔画派的亨德里克·特·布鲁根（Hendrick ter Brugghen），以及他的同辈画家、既是朋友又是对手的扬·利文斯（Jan Lievens）。伦勃朗工作室的学生和助手更是集体亮相，从第一个学生、精细画家格利特·德奥（Gerrit Dou）极其写实、有触感的画风到后期学生浓烈的表现主义手法，可以看出这些人所受到的伦勃朗的影响以及其中变化。

卡雷尔·法布里蒂乌斯（Carel Fabritius）的《夏甲与天使》是其中重要的一幅。法布里蒂乌斯是伦勃朗最赋天资的学生，但在32岁时丧生于代尔夫特的一场火药爆炸，仅有少量画作存世，已被确认出自他手的有13幅。《夏甲与天使》曾经归属奥地利的顺波恩-布赫海姆收藏长达250多年，并且长期被认为是伦勃朗的作品，直到作品将被出售时，人们才在左下角很不起眼的位置发现了法布里蒂乌斯的签名。这也是他13件存世作品中唯一由私人收藏的一幅。

这又引出另一个问题，也是收藏领域的一个永久性话题，即作品归属问题，它牵涉作品考据、鉴定、释义和审美鉴赏等许多方面。这放在伦勃朗身上则出现了两层含义：一是同时代的模仿和代笔，二是后世造假的情况层出不穷。实际上，早在1968年，荷兰国家科学院就启动了一项艺术研究项目“伦勃朗研究计划”（Rembrandt Research Project）。这项计划原本打算对荷兰黄金时代画家的作品进行系统地搜集、整理、研究和鉴定，以便为整个艺术和文化市场提供确凿的判断标准。然而，计划并没有实现预期效果，反而让艺术市场产生了前所未有的焦虑：20世纪初，艺术史学家霍夫斯泰德·迪·格鲁特（Hofstede de Groot）曾估计，伦勃朗的作品总数在1000幅左右，但随着“伦勃朗研究计划”的深入，学者们将这一数字减少到700幅，随后又减少到630幅、420幅……该计划每年都会出版一份

调查报告，用以更新所谓伦勃朗“真迹”的数量。

美国艺术史学家斯维特拉娜·阿尔珀斯（Svetlana Alpers）的研究一定程度上终结了这种焦虑，“归属不明”背后的真正原因就是“艺术的生产机制”，对伦勃朗来说也就是他那个庞大的工作室，学生、助手众多，很多作品是由他们代之完成大部分，面部或手部等重要之处由伦勃朗亲笔绘制，这也是欧洲很多大艺术家惯用的做法。以伦勃朗为首，他工作室的学生、追随者形成了一个“群像”，这一批人的艺术成果才真正代表“荷兰黄金时代”。

面对作品的“真伪”问题，莱顿收藏通常采取保守的态度。“因为市场对伦勃朗的关注非常高，杂音非常大，我们会保持冷静的态度，但同时也会相信我们最专业的判断。”托马斯讲述了一幅真伪争议很大的作品：《白帽女子习作》是莱顿收藏的第一幅伦勃朗作品，它并不是一幅正式的肖像画，只是为了研究如何在老妇人表情丰富的脸部运用光影。2006年，当这幅习作出现在艺术市场上时，争议很大，质疑的声音认为并非出自伦勃朗笔下。因为画作表面附着的颜料层比较复杂，莱顿和鉴定团队认为，这是伦勃朗学生后来又绘制的一个薄层，商议后，他们把表层颜料清洗除去，还原了表层之下的样貌，又经鉴定，确定是伦勃朗原作。伦勃朗采用了难度极高的湿画法，应该是在一天之内快速完成的，这种画法使人物更加灵动逼真。但也许正是由于这种画法，在保存上难于普通木版或布面油画，才可能会出现后添加的颜料层。

从伦勃朗到“精细画家”，再到维米尔，从取材自《圣经》、古代神话和寓言的历史画，到展现日常生活的风俗画、肖像画，中国国家博物馆的这个展览呈现了1620到1690年荷兰绘画的全貌。这个时代是第一次让人们感到艺术离生活很近的一个时代，“可以被大多数人读懂”，大概是荷兰黄金时代艺术区别于其他欧洲古典艺术的最大特征之一了。

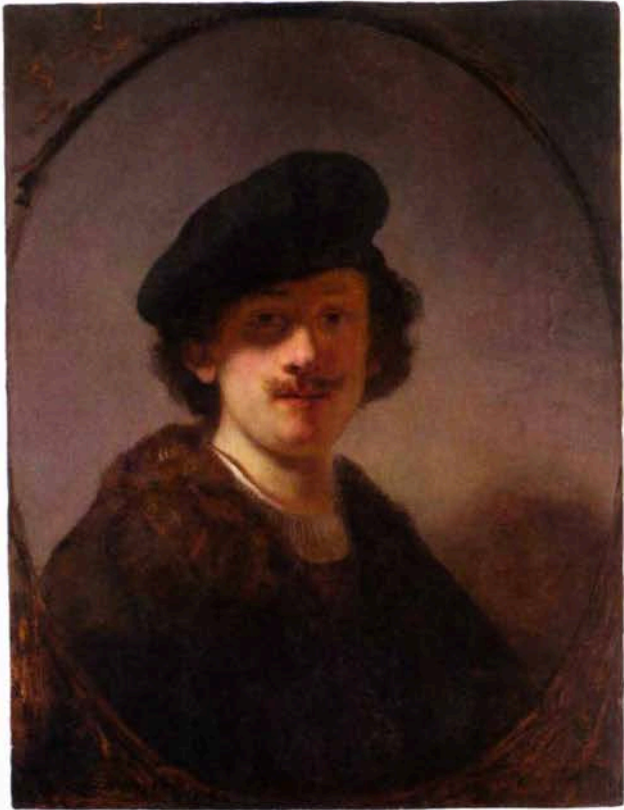
收藏界的另类“成功学”

并非传承数代，也不是用高价创造数字神话的传奇收藏——拥有如此规模和品质的“荷兰画派”收藏，莱顿收藏仅用了14年时间，可以算是收藏界的另类“成功学”了。

命名为“莱顿”，是因为伦勃朗出生于荷兰城



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1. “莱顿收藏”创始人托马斯·卡普兰
2. 《眼部蒙上阴影的自画像》，伦勃朗·范·莱茵
3. 《书房中的女神密涅瓦》，伦勃朗·范·莱茵
4. 《腿上放着一本乐谱的淑女坐像》，格利特·德奥

“用相对低廉的价格转手自己的藏品，以周转资金，而我们正好在危机之前完成了一部分资本转换，得以在这波拍卖低潮中收到很多喜欢的作品。”

市莱顿，并且在这里开启了他早期的绘画创作。托马斯说他自小就喜欢伦勃朗，但后来他到瑞士和英国牛津求学，直到取得历史学博士学位，专业领域与荷兰绘画并无交集。1993年，托马斯开始投资自然矿产，累积了雄厚的资本。虽然喜爱艺术，但托马斯一直没有想过要成为收藏家。很大一个原因是，他以为最受他推崇喜爱的艺术作品——北方巴洛克艺术黄金时代的杰作——均已被博物馆收藏。一次偶然的机会，他从朋友诺曼·罗森塔尔爵士（Sir Norman Rosenthal）处惊讶地得知，他从小喜欢的画作，尤其是大名鼎鼎的伦勃朗流派的作品在市面上仍有购买渠道。

2003年，托马斯和妻子达芙妮建立莱顿收藏，开始正式进入绘画收藏领域。他们购入的第一批画作是伦勃朗的门生格里特·德奥以及他追随者们的几件作品。2006年，他们开始购买伦勃朗作品，它们是素描《静卧的幼狮》和油画《白帽女子习作》。从此，夫妇俩便开启了高速购买伦勃朗画作的旅程，他们买下了近年拍卖市场上出现的几乎所有伦勃朗作品。

“当我投入，我就全情投入。”托马斯在谈到他的收藏之道时用了“all-in”这个词，可以体会到他将全部筹码作为赌注的魄力，而这成为莱顿收藏迅速扩张的重要因素之一。

2007年，托马斯卖出了之前经营的其他重要产业，将更多资本和精力投入到艺术品收藏中。这之后的几年中，他们夫妇又将目光聚焦到旧约和传统叙事主题的作品上。幸运的是，他们没有成为2008年世界金融危机的牺牲品，反而是其中的得利者。托马斯谈到这次经济危机给收藏界带来的震动时说：“很多藏家为了渡过经济难关，用相对低廉的价格转手自己的藏品，以周转资金，而我们正好在危机之前完成了一部分资本转换，得以在这波拍卖低潮中收到很多喜欢的作品，这一点真的很幸运。”维米尔的那幅小画，正是收藏于2008年，同时入手的还有

伦勃朗那幅《眼部蒙上阴影的自画像》。这两件作品，即使陈列在国家级美术馆里也是格外耀眼的。

虽然拥有这么多作品的收藏，但他们夫妇并不像其他收藏家一样，建立属于自己的博物馆或者将作品挂在私人空间。托马斯说他的家里看不到一丝收藏家的影子，墙上连一幅荷兰绘画都没有，“我怎么好意思跟伦勃朗的绘画每时每刻生活在一起呢？”他们在收藏方式上开拓了一种全新的模式，称为“借阅图库”。

莱顿收藏与全球40多家博物馆进行合作，将作品长期放置在某一家博物馆展出或存放，直到有其他博物馆或美术馆有意借展时，再运送给下一个博物馆，这些长期合作的博物馆包括纽约大都会艺术博物馆、美国盖蒂艺术中心博物馆、波士顿美术馆等。

因此，莱顿收藏其实是一个很小的机构，核心成员很少，更多采取的是与其他机构合作的方式，比如，与专业机构或大学合作进行真伪的鉴定，作品的清洗、修复和保护，在这些细化层面，他们非常倚重行业内的专业人士。在购得法布里蒂乌斯的《夏甲与天使》后，莱顿收藏就一直将这幅作品委托给大都会艺术博物馆，由他们负责作品的日常维护和修复，博物馆获得的“回报”是长期展出这件作品。这种前卫的收藏模式，简单来说，就是莱顿拥有作品的所有权，然后将使用权和展出权交给40多家合作博物馆，节省了日常维护的大笔开销，形成一种“性价比”很高的收藏模式。

与拥有这么多珍贵作品相比，“借阅图库”的模式似乎让他们夫妇更有成就感，托马斯曾说：“透过历史的镜头，我们能献给伦勃朗和那些我们珍贵的艺术家们最好的礼物，便是在全球范围内激发公众对他们灿烂遗产更大的兴趣。这不仅局限于收藏领域，而是让更多人得以了解，这些古老大师艺术杰作作为西方文明和普世价值观的基石所具备的重要意义。”

2016年之前，莱顿收藏几乎都以匿名的形式借出藏品，但久而久之，这种匿名方式反而会让作品产生一些无谓的争议。2017年初，他们第一次将藏品集合了30多幅，在卢浮宫进行公开展出，希望呈现出一个荷兰黄金时代的微缩景观。此次在中国国博的展览，是他们全球的第二次亮相。■

（本文图片由莱顿收藏提供）

Life Week	3 July 2017	Xue Fan
<p>“From Rembrandt to Vermeer, He Collected the Dutch Golden Age”</p>		
<p><i>With thirteen Rembrandts and one Vermeer, but no particular private collection space, The Leiden Collection has established an avant-garde alternative to “successful collecting”.</i></p> <p><i>Rembrandt and His Time</i></p> <p>“Rembrandt and His Time”, an exhibition by the American Leiden Collection, is being held at the National Museum of China. In this collection, <i>Young Woman Seated at a Virginal</i> by Vermeer is the main attraction with people stopping by and lingering. This small picture adopts a similar style to Vermeer’s other paintings – delicate, warm and bright, depicting the immediacy of his scenes, with a deep imprint of the seventeenth-century Dutch Golden Age.</p> <p>Vermeer is full of mystery and often the center of people’s discussions. One of the reasons why is simply that so little – if at all verifiable – is known about him; another reason is that only thirty-four works are officially recognized as authentic Vermeers, most of which are held in national museums and art galleries around the world.</p> <p><i>The most direct and visual way to understand Holland in the seventeenth century is through its paintings.</i></p> <p>The revolt of the Netherlands (Dutch Revolt) was the first case in history of a successful bourgeois revolution. While most European countries were still under the rule of feudal autocracy, the Dutch Republic had become the most advanced country in Europe at that time. With the rise of townspeople who enjoyed decorating their interiors with paintings, art began to free itself from the shackles of religion and court, and walked into ordinary people’s lives. “From town halls and other public places to orphanages and cottages, from the houses of nobility to those of ordinary people, paintings were everywhere except churches.” When most scholars attributed such an active art market to the “desire for beauty”, Dutch historian Johan Huizinga pointed out that this phenomenon actually represented modern people trying to use their own aesthetic standards in order to imagine the then Dutch mind. In his view, “what matters most is the unshakable belief in the reality and importance of all things; the love for life and interest in the environment around”. The most significant features of the seventeenth-century “Dutch School” were indeed realism and mysterious innuendo.</p> <p>The Dutch paintings of this period have thus become the passion of collectors. In 2003, Thomas S. Kaplan and his wife, Daphne Recanati Kaplan, started The Leiden Collection – today one of the world’s most important collections of the Dutch Golden Age, comprising over 250 works from the period. In addition to the only privately owned Vermeer, what the Kaplans are most proud of are the eleven oil paintings and two</p>		

sketches by Rembrandt, which represents the single largest collection of works by the Dutch master outside of national museums.

Rembrandt was undoubtedly the leader of that era – in fact, the exhibition begins with him. In addition to several typical “Rembrandt style” portraits, the three paintings belonging to the early period “The Series of the Five Senses” stand out quite clearly from those of the mature period in terms of style – making them even more precious. *Stone Operation (Allegory of Touch)*, *Three Musicians (Allegory of Hearing)*, and *Unconscious Patient (Allegory of Smell)*, are all oil paintings smaller in size than an A4 piece of paper. They were painted between 1624 and 1625, when Rembrandt was but a teenager and still living in Leiden. *Unconscious Patient (Allegory of Smell)* is the earliest signed picture of the master. The painting depicts the characters’ exaggerated expressions with humorous strokes. But the coarse brushwork and obvious strokes are evidence of the early Rembrandt style. From the stylized colors and the use of light and shadows, one can nonetheless tell that they were produced by a young man’s hand.

These works by Rembrandt represent the core of both the exhibition and The Leiden Collection itself, and indeed what most viewers will be attracted to. However, against the background of the brilliant seventeenth-century Holland, these pieces also serve as a key to unlock the door to a new era and “doctrine”.

During his interview with us, Thomas repeatedly stressed that “The Leiden Collection is not about showing Rembrandt's personal artistic development trajectory. On the contrary, it puts him in the context of the artistic creation of the era, creating dialogues with other artists”. These include Pieter Lastman, Rembrandt’s teacher in Amsterdam, Hendrick ter Brugghen, follower of Utrecht Caravaggism, and his contemporary Jan Lievens, who was both his friend and his rival. The exhibition also features an ensemble of works by the students and assistants of Rembrandt. From his first student, the fine painter Gerrit Dou, demonstrating extreme realism with meticulous strokes, to his students of the later period, who clearly demonstrated expressionism, one can appreciate the significant influence that Rembrandt had on them as well as their evolving styles over time.

Hagar and the Angel, by Carel Fabritius, is one of the major works. Fabritius was one of the most talented students of Rembrandt. He died in the Delft gunpowder explosion at the age of thirty-two. Only about a dozen of his paintings have survived, with thirteen confirmed to be by him. *Hagar and the Angel* was part of the Schönborn-Buchheim Collection for some two hundred and fifty years, at which time it was attributed to Rembrandt, until Fabritius’s signature was found in the lower left of the painting before being sold. This piece is also the only privately owned work amongst his official thirteen.

This story points to another recurrent issue in the field of collecting; namely, the attribution of works. The process involves many aspects such as textual research, identification, interpretation, and aesthetic appreciation. In Rembrandt’s case, two particular issues are at play: imitations or ghost painters, and endless forgery attempts over time. In fact, as early as 1968, the National Academy of Sciences in Holland launched an art research project called the “Rembrandt Research Project”. This initiative

was originally intended to systematically collect, collate, study, and identify the works by painters of the Dutch Golden Age, in order to provide a reliable standard of judgment for the entire art and cultural market. However, the plan did not achieve its intended results and instead created great anxiety in the art market. The early 20th century art historian Hofstede de Groot estimated that there were about 1,000 works by Rembrandt around, but given the progress of the Rembrandt Research Project, scholars had first reduced this number to 700, later to 630, and then 420... A survey report would be published every year, in order to update the number of so-called “authentic” Rembrandts.

A study by American historian Svetlana Alpers somehow managed to put an end to this anxiety. The real issue behind the problem of attribution appeared to be the “Art Production System”, which in Rembrandt’s case was his sizable studio filled with students and assistants. In fact many of his works were mostly painted by these individuals, while the critical details, such as the faces and hands, were finished by the master himself. This was a common practice for many artists across Europe. Led by Rembrandt, his studio students and followers effectively formed a group whose collective artistic achievements represent the “Dutch Golden Age”.

The Leiden Collection is usually very conservative when it comes to authenticating works. “Because the market pays close attention to Rembrandt and because there is a lot of noise. We always remain calm, but at the same time will have great faith in our professional judgment.” Thomas talked to us about the controversy surrounding *Study of a Woman in a White Cap*, which is the first Rembrandt ever acquired by The Leiden Collection. It is not a formal portrait, but a study of light and shadows on an old woman’s expressive face. In 2006, when the painting appeared in the art market, it caused a lot of controversy. There were some doubts as to its authenticity as a “real” Rembrandt. Because the layer of paint on the surface appeared more complex, The Leiden Collection and the identification teams thought that this was a thin layer painted by one of Rembrandt’s students. After consultation, they removed the surface paint, restored the painting underneath, and ultimately identified the work to be an original Rembrandt. Rembrandt must have used the complex “wet painting” method, and finished the piece within a day. This particular method helps make the characters look more realistic. But its use also made the preservation of the painting more difficult than the usual wood panel or cloth oil paint – which is possibly why the painting was covered later on.

In this exhibition, the National Museum of China presents the whole embodiment of Dutch paintings from 1620 to 1690 – from Rembrandt to the “fine painters”, to Vermeer; from the Bible, ancient myths, fables and historical paintings, to genre paintings and portraits, This corresponds to the era when, for the first time, people felt that art was close to their lives and could be “understood” by most. This particular point is probably one of the most prominent features of Dutch Golden Age art, in contrast to other European classical arts.

An Alternative Storyline to “Successful Collecting”

Neither inherited through several generations, nor constituting some mythical collection

assembled via impossibly high bidding prices, this collection of such scale and quality only took The Leiden Collection fourteen years to come together. It can also be regarded as an alternative storyline to “successful collecting”.

Leiden was the Dutch city where Rembrandt was born and started his early years as a painter. Thomas told us that his love story with Rembrandt began as a child. But he then went to Switzerland and later Oxford in the United Kingdom to pursue his studies. Through to his doctorate in history, Kaplan’s areas of expertise and Dutch paintings never really crossed. In 1993, he started investing in minerals mining and accumulated a colossal wealth. Despite his love for art, he never thought of becoming a collector. One of the biggest reasons for that was his assumption that all of his favorite works of art – masterpieces from the Northern Baroque art Golden Age – were already owned by museums. By chance, he was surprised to learn from his friend Sir Norman Rosenthal that his favorite paintings, especially the famous Rembrandt works, actually could still be purchased.

In 2003, Thomas and his wife Daphne created The Leiden Collection, officially entering the art-collecting field. The first few paintings that they purchased were by Gerrit Dou and his followers. In 2006, they started buying works by Rembrandt; namely, *Young Lion Resting* and *The Study of Woman in a White Cap*. From then onwards, the couple started their frantic journey of Rembrandt collecting, and bought almost all the works by Rembrandt available on the market in recent years.

“Once I’m in, I’m all in.” Thomas used “all-in” to refer to his collecting. One can feel his passion for art, which is the driving force behind the expansion of The Leiden Collection.

In 2007, Thomas sold all of his major holdings to invest more capital and energy into collecting works of art. In the following years, the couple focused on the works of the Old Testament and the traditional narrative works. Fortunately, they did not become the victims of the 2008 financial crisis, but rather the beneficiaries. Thomas talked about the shock that the economic crisis brought to the collecting world, declaring: “In order to survive these economic difficulties, many collectors offloaded some of their collections at relatively low prices in order to maintain cash flow. We had just finished some capital conversion before the crisis, which enabled us to acquire many desired paintings during a significant market downturn. We were rather fortunate in that.” The small painting by Vermeer was acquired in 2008, together with *Self-Portrait with Shaded Eyes* by Rembrandt. The two paintings would have been dazzling even in a national museum collection.

With such a collection in hand, the couple nevertheless remains very different from other collectors who have built their own museums or hung their paintings in private spaces. Thomas mentioned that one could not find the trace of a single piece from the collection in his own house, let alone a Dutch painting on his walls. “How could I have the nerve to live with Rembrandt’s paintings every day?” Instead they invented a new model of collecting, known as the “lending library”.

The Leiden Collection is collaborating with over forty museums around the world, lending its pieces to be exhibited or stored in one of the institutions for some time, until another museum or gallery expresses the wish to borrow them. These museums include the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Getty Center, and the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston.

The Leiden Collection is a small organization with only a few core members. It emphasizes collaboration with other organizations, such as professional institutions or universities, to authenticate, clean, repair, and protect paintings. On these specific areas of expertise, they rely quite heavily on industry professionals. After the acquisition of *Hagar and the Angel*, The Leiden Collection entrusted the work to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, which is responsible for the day-to-day maintenance and repair of the painting. In return, the museum enjoys the ability to display this particular piece on a long-term basis. In other words, in this kind of *avant-garde* collection model, The Leiden Collection retains ownership of the works, but entrusts the right to use and display them to more than forty collaborating museums – thereby saving on the significant expenses of daily maintenance, while inventing a new and highly cost-effective approach to collecting.

Compared with simply owning a huge collection of precious art works, the “lending library” model seems to provide the couple with a greater sense of accomplishment. Thomas said: “Through the lens of history, the best gift that we can dedicate to Rembrandt and those most cherished artists is to stimulate the public interest for their global heritage worldwide. This is not limited to the art collection only. Our aspiration is to help more people appreciate the significance of these ancient art masterpieces, as the foundation of Western civilization and universal values.”

Before 2016, The Leiden Collection was almost entirely on loan and always on an anonymous basis. But over time, this anonymity caused unnecessary controversy for some of the works. At the beginning of 2017 and for the very first time, thirty or so paintings from the collection were publicly displayed at the Louvre, as a special exhibition on the Dutch Golden Age. The current exhibition at the National Museum of China is the collection’s second appearance in the world.