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## Rembrandt in Russia: Pushkin and Hermitage Give Leiden Collection a New Spiritual Home

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Collector Tom Kaplan. Image courtesy of The Leiden Collection

“For any collector of Rembrandt, Russia is pretty close to Mecca,” says Thomas Kaplan, the owner of the largest number of paintings by the Dutch master in private hands. “[The Hermitage](#) is one of the greatest repositories of Dutch art in the world. If you are as enthralled with *The Return of the Prodigal Son* (1663–1669) as I am, then the Hermitage might as well be the Kaaba stone.”

With his wife Daphne, Kaplan has spent the past 15 years amassing a collection of masterpieces by Dutch Golden Age artists such as Rembrandt, Gerrit Dou, Jan Steen and Carel

Fabritius. They are deeply committed to making the Leiden Collection, named after the Dutch city where Rembrandt was born, accessible to the public. They have lent to museums including the [Prado](#) and the [National Gallery](#) in London, while Arthur Wheelock, the curator of Northern Baroque paintings at the [National Gallery of Art](#), Washington DC, oversaw a scholarly online catalogue published last year.

Now, as part of a world tour that began at the [Louvre](#) in 2017, the collection is coming to Russia for a remarkable exhibition double-bill, beginning with at the [Pushkin Museum](#) in Moscow on 28 March, and continuing at the Hermitage in St. Petersburg in September.



Rembrandt van Rijn, *Minerva in Her Study*, 1635. Courtesy of The Leiden Collection

The idea of exhibiting his collection in Russia occurred to Kaplan on a visit in 2014. “I had taken my family there to explore the country’s history. We were standing amid the Rembrandt’s at the Hermitage and I said to my wife: ‘Wouldn’t it be amazing to exhibit here?’” This off-hand comment became a reality when Kaplan met Marina Loshak, the director of the Pushkin Museum, in February 2017. “She asked if would I consider Russia, and I said with great pleasure.”



Johannes Vermeer, *Young Woman Seated at a Virginal*, c. 1670-1672. Courtesy of The Leiden Collection

What followed was an invitation from the Pushkin and the Hermitage to mount an exhibition focusing on developments around the artistic center of Leiden. Among the 82 works on display will be the only privately owned late painting by Johannes Vermeer, *Young Woman Seated at a Virginal*, 1670–1672, which depicts a woman wrapped in a yellow shawl, locking eyes with the viewer as she plays the piano. Jan Steen's *Prayer Before the Meal*, 1660, presents a tranquil scene of family life in which every detail – the cracked bread, the mother's fraying head scarf, the pheasant crossing the path outside – is captured with a tenderness indicative of a deep spirituality.



Jan Steen, *Prayer Before the Meal*, 1660. Courtesy of The Leiden Collection

Twelve of Rembrandt's paintings are on show. These include three of his *Senses*, a series of allegorical representations of touch, hearing, smell, sight and taste, among his earliest known works. Proceeding chronologically, the exhibition ends with late works such as *Portrait of a Seated Woman with Her Hands Clasped*, 1660, a harrowing depiction of an elderly woman, her hands clenched in contemplation.

Kaplan expects one portrait to be of particular interest to a Russian audience. "Because of the importance of Russia in the history of Rembrandt collecting, one of the most important pieces will be the painting of the goddess Minerva (*Minerva in Her Study*, 1635)." This painting is part of a series that includes the Hermitage's own *Flora*, 1634. Kaplan says its subject also is reminiscent of one of Russia's own secular goddesses. "The symbolism of Minerva as the goddess of war and wisdom is resonant in Russia because who was the major collector of Dutch Old Masters paintings in a certain era? Catherine the Great." Catherine assembled the largest collection of Dutch art outside of Holland, and "would acquire collections such as ours in one bite," says Kaplan.



Leonardo da Vinci, *Head of a Bear*, c. 1485. Courtesy of The Leiden Collection

While there are two drawings of animals in the exhibition – a reclining lion by Rembrandt and Leonardo Da Vinci’s *Head of a Bear*, c.1485 – Kaplan says that what underpins the works in The Leiden Collection is their close attachment to humanity. “Our paintings involve people. Whether they’re portraits, history scenes, genre scenes or scenes of everyday life. It involves being able to experience their interior life.”



Carel Fabritius, *Hagar and the Angel*, c. 1645. Courtesy of The Leiden Collection

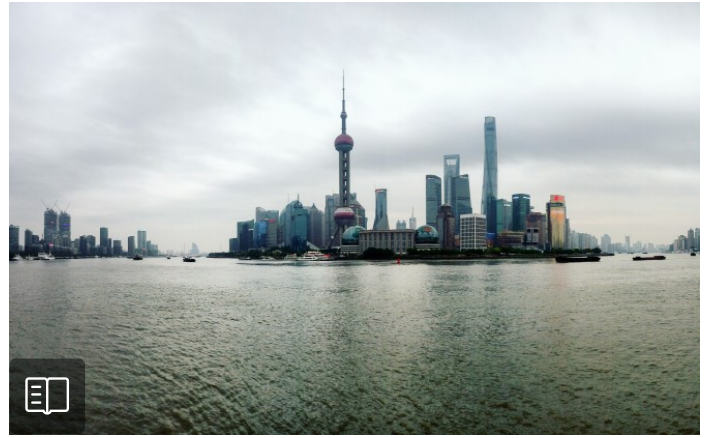
The prevailing wisdom is that contemporary art is more popular than Old Masters. But Kaplan says that does not have to be the case. “Hit them with shock and awe, and if you do that, people will look at Old Masters and they’ll say: ‘My God, there’s as much drama in a Carel Fabritius as there is in Damien Hirst.’ Take it.”

[The Age of Rembrandt and Vermeer. Masterpieces from the Leiden Collection](#) will be on view at the Pushkin Museum from 28 March to 22 July, and The State Hermitage Museum from 5 September to 13 January 2019. It will then travel to the [Louvre Abu Dhabi](#) in early 2019.

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