# САНКТ-ПЕТЕРБУРГСКИЕ 🔀 ВЕДОМОСТИ

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отдел культуры сult@spbvedomosti.ru

# Не нужно быть гением, чтобы купить шедевр

### Сирень для «Шапели»

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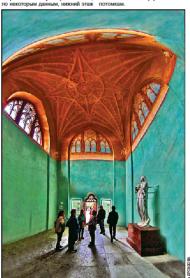
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модеринистов XX войа, колилекцию работ которых собраная суптурта. А готарые положения и посторые поставления и поторые положения и поторые поставления поторые поставления и поторые поставления по поставления по соторые поставления по поставления по соторые поставления по потавления по поставления по поставления по почавления по почавления по почавления по почавления по почавления по почавления по потавления по почавления п

## «Не вижу Сирано...»





### "One has to be a genius to be Rembrandt, not to buy his works"

As our readers already know, the Nicholas Hall of the Winter Palace is hosting the exhibition "The Age of Rembrandt and Vermeer: Masterpieces of The Leiden Collection," through mid-January 2019. The show revolves around a collection of Dutch Golden Age art that exceeds all other known private collections in both quality and scope. Its owners – the American couple Thomas Kaplan and Daphne Recanati Kaplan – managed, in 15 years, to assemble some 250 works by 17<sup>th</sup>-century Dutch masters.

The family's collecting journey began with Daphne Recanati Kaplan's focus on  $20^{th}$ -century modern design furniture, while the Old Masters have represented Thomas Kaplan's passion ever since he was a child. He is a billionaire international investor, philanthropist and collector. His financial interests center on the fields of gold, silver, platinum and hydrocarbons. Our reporter Ludmila Leusskaya interviewed Thomas Kaplan in the Winter Palace's finest hall.

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- Mr. Kaplan, how would you describe your relationship with the Hermitage?
- I believe that the museum world has two magical names The Hermitage and The Louvre. We had the privilege of opening our Collection's world tour at The Louvre. The museum is in Paris, where my family spends a good part of the year. From Paris, we went on to Beijing where the Collection was shown at the National Museum of China, which also represented a great honor. Shortly after that, we traveled to the Long Museum in Shanghai and the Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts in Moscow.

The reception in Moscow was truly amazing. But the Hermitage carries something transcendental in its very meaning, something beyond rationality. For me, it mostly has to do with its Rembrandt collection. I said this many times, but if Amsterdam is the Mecca of Dutch art, then surely Saint Petersburg represents Medina.

Four years ago, I came to Saint Petersburg with my family to show them the Hermitage. This visit included a tour of the Rembrandt collection. They were all stunned by the same paintings that always leave me speechless; particularly *The Return of the Prodigal Son*. When I told them a year ago that the Hermitage would be one of the institutions in which our Collection would be exhibited, they all agreed that it would most likely end up being the most important place of all.

- Let's move to the Collection. Why didn't you name it after yourself, as many collectors do?
- A famous collector of modern art, Charles Saatchi, once stated: "It's not about the collectors, but the artists." I often say: One has to be a genius to *be* Rembrandt, not to buy his works.

We don't feel the need to disseminate our name; we feel the need to disseminate the art of Rembrandt. That's the reason why we named the Collection after a city that was dear to the Master, and not after ourselves. This was our way to pay tribute to the artist.

I wish to add that we have never lived with any of these paintings. We always believed that our mission was to take them from the private spheres and put them back into the public domain. We maintained strict anonymity until the exhibition at The Louvre. But the Collection already had a reputation as a "Lending Library" from which books or, in this case, paintings, could be borrowed. In fact, our works have been exhibited in over 40 museums.

- Exhibited anonymously... What made you come out of the shadows?
- We had no choice, as we had already crossed the Rubicon. Few people knew our identities, but our Collection constituted the largest private "Lending Library" working with museums all around the world. As a matter of fact, our approach to collecting works of art was different from other collectors: we did not buy "anything" and were not focused on one particular painting. Our Collection intentionally left out a few areas landscapes, for example. But there are plenty of human subjects, which to us represent the most important aspect in a collection. Our intention was not only to exhibit the paintings, but also tell the story of the artists who created them, along with the complex and fascinating connections between them.

We felt the need to gather all of that information and publish it online. As this decision was being made, we were confronted with a choice: either remain anonymous like some collectors, or share this body of scholarship to the broader public and thus come into the light. That's when The Louvre offered to exhibit our Collection, becoming the first museum to display our masterpieces.

- What have been your greatest joy and your greatest disappointment since you started collecting?
- A year ago, I would have answered that my greatest disappointment was the inability to acquire the smallest privately-owned work by Rembrandt. But we ended up being successful and the painting will be exhibited in Abu Dhabi as the tour continues.

I have purchased a large number of pieces under the most surprising circumstances. Acquiring them initially seemed impossible such as, for instance, *Minerva in Her Study* by Rembrandt – a true masterpiece, the embodiment of what an artist can do. The Master dreamed to become an artist who could paint historical scenes. Paintings like *Minerva in Her Study* or *Flora* reflect his aspirations and indeed his passion.

The most amazing moment for me as a collector was the acquisition of the Fabritius painting. We own several works by Rembrandt, his students, as well as the artists in his circle. Rembrandt's finest student was Carel Fabritius. Very few of his works have survived – only sixteen – because he died young. The painting that we bought had been privately owned by an aristocratic family for over 200 years. For a Rembrandt collector, acquiring this particular painting was akin to discovering the Holy Grail.

I believe that, had Rembrandt seen this work by Fabritius, he would have told him that the student had reached the master. Imagining this conversation fascinates me.

- Would you consider Minerva in Her Study to be the symbol of the exhibition? You often refer to that particular painting, as if it were your favorite.
- When I say that I don't have a favorite painting, that's absolutely true. Each work brings back memories memories of acquiring them, the provenance, etc. As any collector, my love for my paintings is multidimensional. The first dimension is aesthetic, but there are many others.

I am not surprised at all that *Minerva in Her Study* is so close to the Russian spirit. When I look at the painting, I think of Catherine the Great. Minerva was the Goddess of both wisdom and war. She personifies the empress-philosopher, much like Catherine. It is significant that Rembrandt gave these traits to a woman – namely, power and internal tensions. We look at Minerva and see, not a classical representation of beauty, but rather a strong and independent woman. This proves the point that Rembrandt initiated a true revolution in art in his time – which later transpired throughout art history.

- The exhibition in Russia is larger than the one at The Louvre. Why did you choose to expand it?
- When we went to China, our partner museums asked us to expand the exhibition. There were some 30 works at The Louvre and we were asked to double that amount. For China, our show represented the first exhibition of Dutch art an introduction to its history. We maintained that momentum and decided to bring over 80 works to Russia. Our intention is to keep it up as we travel to the Middle East next year to Louvre Abu Dhabi.
- You have now shown your Collection to the world. What's next: take a break and build a museum?
- We are still acquiring paintings. I just mentioned the small piece by Rembrandt that was such a source of pride. In addition, we purchased two large Rembrandts over the past year and certainly will continue to do so. We monitor the market closely and when an opportunity arises, we move to make the acquisition. As for the future, there are no clear plans. But our intention is to continue lending our paintings to museums.
- How do you feel about the exhibition in the Nicholas Hall of the Winter Palace and the idea of complementing your Collection with paintings from the Hermitage?
- I could not imagine a more appropriate venue to showcase our Collection or paintings by Rembrandt for that matter, given that his finest works are here. The Hermitage museum represents the Master's "spiritual home." I believe that, outside of the Netherlands, Russia understands best the significance of this artist. Rembrandt has become a part of the Russian culture.

It is the first time that a museum in which we are presenting our Collection has decided to lend some of its works for the exhibition. We are immensely grateful for such a gesture, which evidences the connections between our respective collections. Irina Sokolova, the keeper of the Hermitage's Dutch art collection, has suggested paintings that are magnificent in their own right. And they complement beautifully the story that our collection tells.

Ultimately, the exhibition looks stunning in the Nicholas Hall of the Winter Palace.