

Message of Humanity, Triumph of Civility: The Leiden Collection in Amsterdam

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Rare exhibition of the Masterpieces from The Leiden Collection in Amsterdam. Photo (C) Inna Rogatchi

Part I

The Idea, the Space & the Point

The city of Amsterdam got extremely lucky. They've managed to get the exhibition extraordinaire to celebrate the 750th anniversary of the city with one of the richest histories in the world.

In anticipation of such a special date, the leadership of the H'ART Museum, one of the loveliest, livest and a very well-managed cultural institutions in Amsterdam, got a brilliant idea: they reached out to *Thomas S. Kaplan*, the owner of The Leiden Collection, with whom they did cooperate successfully previously and asked him and his team for a possibility to arrange the exhibition of their masterpieces in the city where most of the artists collected by the Kaplan family lived and worked.

Given the previous very successful cooperation between The Leiden Collection and the H'ART museum, which hosted their previous exhibition of the works focused on the Biblical and theological themes, it was a logical request and a natural continuation of a productive cooperation.

For the celebrating five-month long current exhibition, the large, airy, and inviting premises of the H'ART Museum were transformed by their quite able and innovative team into an abstract contemporary 'template' of an old city with its characteristic elements of architecture, all in a bold colors, which all surprisingly provided fresh and engaging context-placement for as many as 75 art treasures, corresponding to the celebrating number of years of the Dutch capital.



Photo Inna Rogatchi (C), 2025

Masterpieces from The Leiden Collection exhibition at the H'ART Museum, Amsterdam. Spring 2025.
Photo (C) Inna Rogatchi

The exhibition curator from The Leiden Collection side, **Elizabeth Nogrady** told me, all smiles, of *'truly enthusiastic, fresh, inventive, highly motivated and very professional works of entire H'ART Museum team'*, led by the well-known in both Dutch and international top art circles the museum's director, **Annabelle Birnie**, in building the exhibition and *"creating the atmosphere of friendship, understanding, and mutual engagement"*.

The vision for the concept of this truly rare, on any account, exhibition was enlighten to me by the Senior Advisor to The Leiden Collection, a legendary **Arthur K. Wheelock Jr.**, the one of the leading experts on the Dutch Golden Age and Northern Baroque world-wide: “ *In celebration of the 750th anniversary of Amsterdam, we wanted to show to the best that our collection provides, the life of Amsterdam and the Netherlands as seen by Rembrandt, his contemporaries and his pupils, via the prism of many aspects: people, scenes of life, genre scenes, authentic fashion, musical instruments, letters and books, period houses and how they were looking inside, because it reflects the way of life of the people to the best. Any authentic signs of life, the direct message from Rembrandt and his school, the sons of their country and their time, has become the focus of this special exhibition*”, – Arthur K. Wheelock Jr. explained to me.



Arthur K. Wheelock Jr., Senior Adviser for The Leiden Collection. Photo (C) Aad Hoogendorn. (C) The Leiden Collection. With kind permission.

Intellectually, this idea, to celebrate a milestone date for Amsterdam as a city by physical presence of a stunning amount of 75 rare treasures of world art, created by the great Amsterdammers and Dutch artists themselves, is perfect. But visual art works not only at the intellectual level, fortunately. It involves our senses and our emotions, and often it works its own miraculous ways, just like music. From the perspective of senses, this exhibition is stunning.

Rare Cultural Treasures at Public Display

The problem with this fantastic exhibition for a reviewer is that one can write an essay of its own practically about each of 75 great and rare artworks on display. The highly concentrated richness of the exhibition is one of its main overall characteristics.

Amazed by all nineteen Rembrandts, including an incredible *Portrait of a Seated Woman with Her Hands Clasped*, and fantastic trio of the *Allegory of Senses*, one comes to the work of **Vermeer**, the only one in the world that is in a private collection, *Young Woman Seated at a Virginal*. And one is lost. How on earth could Vermeer master a painting in such detail on such a small scale of the work?



Vermeer's *Young Woman Seated Next to a Virginal* (c. 1670 – 1675) at the exhibition in Amsterdam. Spring – Summer 2025. Credit (C) The Leiden Collection. With kind permission.

I was lucky to discuss Vermeer, one of the most mysterious artists in many respects, with an ultimate world authority on him, **Arthur K. Wheelock Jr.**, who did share his thoughts with me. *“Additionally to everything that we know about this work by Vermeer’, and I was extremely lucky to be present throughout several months of its cleaning and restoration, what strikes me the most is its intimacy. The message of it and, even more importantly and more valuably, the atmosphere of it. Given the size of the work, I was imagining, just for myself, that the work well might be standing on somebody’s desk, and its closeness would emphasize and facilitate its very special message to this person, or anyone behind that desk, even more powerfully.*

Don’t you have an impression, looking at this small painting, a marvel of an art, that the girl there is playing just for you?” – asked Mr Wheelock Jr, and I reflected in one breath: *“ I do, absolutely”*.

To look at an original Vermeer for as long as you would like to, without struggling with a Mona Lisa-like crowd in front of the work, is a rare luxury. There is a constant flow of many visitors at the Leiden Collection exhibition in Amsterdam, but all of it is organized so well and reasonably, without any unnecessary stress. It very fortunately contributes to the process of comfortable and sophisticated mental digesting of such a highly concentrated collection of the stunning display.

Arthur K. Wheelock Jr. agreed with me on my suggestion that most likely, we would not see any other work of Vermeer in any other private collection ever again. And this makes the impression of the small serene, serious and charming girl as if playing for you, somewhat of a miracle materialized.

There is one more unique piece of art which the visitors of the exhibition in Amsterdam might well be the people who are lucky to see Rembrandt’s original drawing for the last time at public display. The elegant vitrine set on its own in a very well designed room, hosts a fantastic Rembrandt’s rendering of a tiger, *A Lioness Resting*, made by the artist from a nature, at the shows of the exotic animals brought to Amsterdam by ships from the West-Indies, presumably between 1638 – 1642.



Rembrandt. A Lioness Resting. Original drawing. The Leiden Collection. With kind permission.

There are just six Rembrandt's drawings of lions known, three of young ones and three of old ones, none of them is similar to the others. Among the young ones, two of the drawings belong to the British Museum, and one which is on display in Amsterdam is at The Leiden Collection from 2005. Remarkably, this very special original Rembrandt drawing was never ever exhibited before 2006, this is for 370 years. Nobody ever saw the work publicly. Becoming the part of The Leiden Collection, the work now is on its twelfth international exhibition, literally globe-wise, from Shanghai to Paris, and from Abu-Dhabi to Amsterdam.

This exhibition seems to be the last one for the Young Lion Resting twenty years world tour. The owner of The Leiden Collection, who is also the founder of a well-known wild life-preservation Panthera philanthropic organization, has decided to auction the rare work in benefit of it. The auction is expected next year, and it is already very highly anticipated.

The Appeal to Humanity, the Triumph of Civility

As the superb The Leiden Collection team emphasizes, the core message of the exhibition of 75 rare art treasures is humanity. *‘What we were trying to achieve in this exhibition, the largest of our collection to date, is to construct and to present a multi-aspected message of humanity. This was our main criteria for selecting the works to be exhibited in Amsterdam’* – said Elizabeth Nogrady, the curator of the exhibition.



Elizabeth Nogrady, curator of the From Rembrandt to Vermeer exhibition in Amsterdam. The Leiden Collection. Photo (C) Aad Hoogendoorn. With kind permission.

What you can actually feel while moving in disbelief through large and airy halls of the H'ART Museum that hosted the exhibition on its two floors, and what post-feelings and post-impressions you have after the visit, is a human presence, and also the authentic time-traveling. The first is due to the character of Thomas S. Kaplan and his wife Dafne Recanati Kaplan The Leiden Collection, which concentrates on portraits, human character studies and various genre scenes, which are also often dynamic and non trivial character studies. The second impression when one feels literally traveling to the past in the most authentic way is due to the quality of the art in this unique collection.

When one is privileged to see in a close proximity and in a perfect settings such rare masterpieces, and in such a quantity, the result is that one travels back in time effortlessly, being transported there not only by the extremely masterly visual interpretations of the people and scenes of life created four hundred years back, but also by the preserved in the originals authors' presence. The main effect of this exhibition is that Rembrandt, Vermeer, Lievens, and anyone else from the presented at the exhibition 27 artists from the Dutch Golden Age have been transcending their own presence upon us visiting them today.

Four centuries back, they all, including the great masters as *Rembrandt, Vermeer and Lievens*, very good ones as *Hals, Mieries, Dou, Sweerts* and the rest of the presented artists, infused a part of themselves into their works . The secret of real art is that an artist's energy and artist's presence stays in his or her works indefinitely, as we can see – and feel it – from Rafael to Chagall and from El Greco to Magritt. It is the same with the presence in their creations of great composers and writers. That's why it is essential to [research](#) and [educate](#) on the main threads of the authentic, not AI-d fashioned culture today.

This accumulated and continuing presence of those people, irrelevant from the time when their works were produced, is the vitamin of civility for every next generation. What The Leiden Collection is doing for at least a decade by now, in the way of their splendid exhibitions, and for two decades in the way of lending their works to important institutions and causes, is quite unusual for private collections and is highly commendable. They are sharing. Sharing non-stop.



Masterpieces from The Leiden Collection exhibition at the H'ART Museum, Amsterdam. Spring – Summer 2025. Photo (C) Inna Rogatchi

The next exhibition of The Leiden Collection is planned for the United States. After ending the exhibition in Amsterdam, a slightly altered show called *Art and Life in Rembrandt's Time* is expected to be on display in Florida, at the Norton Museum of Art at the West Palm Beach, from October 2025 through March 2026. It would be the first in the decade exhibition of such a large collection of the works of Rembrandt and his contemporaries in the US.

Thomas and Daphne Kaplan and their team do have the vision and the clear understanding of how to implement their vision at the best professional and human level.

"This collection stays absolutely apart from any other among the private collections world-wide – tells me Arthur K. Wheelock Jr. , great art historian of our time who masters his subject on an unparalleled level. – There is simply nothing like that exists in the matter of private collecting and how they are functioning today. The Leiden Collection is interested, first and foremost of all, to share their treasures with the public, the wider, the better. This is a very rare stand of a private collector. In fact, it is a unique one".

Given the knowledge of Thomas S.Kaplan and his understanding of the subject of his collection of the works of Rembrandt and the Dutch Old Masters, which is also emphasised by Dr Wheelock, it provides, additionally to very convincing and beautifully presented appeal to humanity by the Masterpieces from The Leiden Collection exhibition in Amsterdam, also a strong, elegant and winning statement on civility as the one of the pillars of our life today. And tomorrow.

Amsterdam

May – June 2025

From Rembrandt to Vermeer. Masterpieces from The Leiden Collection. H'ART Museum. Amsterdam. April 9 – August 24, 2025.