

Got an Old Master TO SPARE?

They call him the Rembrandt evangelist. This fall you will understand why.

BY LEENA KIM

Thomas Kaplan was just a kid when he had his first brush with Rembrandt, at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. “I was completely struck by the power of his painting,” he says. “I want to put that into context: I was six. So the concept that, as André Malraux put it, Rembrandt was the first to touch the soul with his paintings could not have been part of my intellectual or emotional makeup at the time. And yet something about those works moved me.”

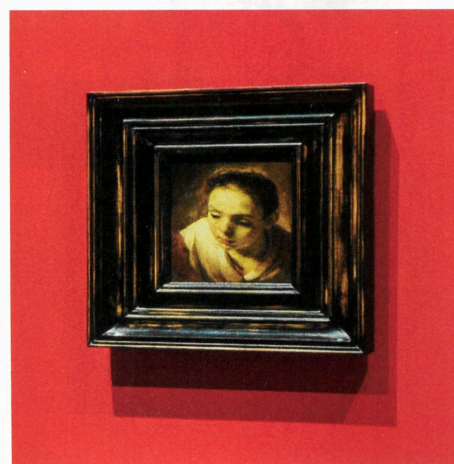
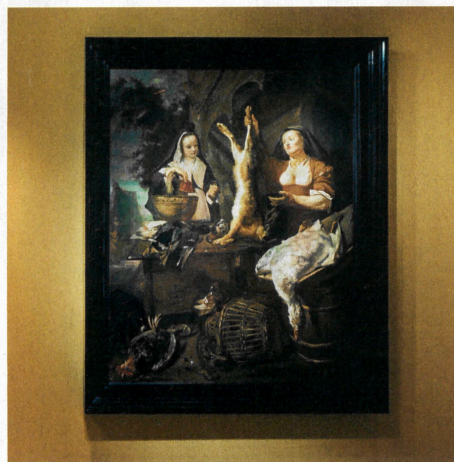
The whims of children tend to be fleeting—not so for Kaplan, who continued to fuel his obsession with Rembrandt via weekly trips to the Met with his mother (her attempt to expand his palate with a visit to the Museum of Modern Art was not well received) and, as he grew older, pilgrimages to the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, and to any museum in the world with a Rembrandt in it. “It’s

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normal for me to go out of my way to see Rembrandt,” he says. “What I never desired, nor expected, was to own one.”

This was not for lack of funds. Kaplan, a precious metals investor and the chairman of the Electrum Group, an asset management firm based in New York, is a member of the three comma club. But circa 2002, when his mother-in-law suggested he start collecting art, he “completely rejected it. I said, ‘I will never be a vulgar materialist,’ sweeping my arm and pointing toward the ceiling.”

Turns out mothers (even in-laws) do know best. By the following year Kaplan and his wife Daphne were buying up Old Masters at warp speed (one a week on average). To



“Art and Life in Rembrandt’s Time: Masterpieces from the Leiden Collection” opens October 25 at the Norton Museum of Art in West Palm Beach. The show features more than 70 significant Dutch Golden Age works collected by Thomas Kaplan, including (from top) Vermeer’s *Young Woman Seated at a Virginal*, Gabriël Metsu’s *Woman Selling Game from a Stall*, Jan Lievens’s *Boy in a Cape and Turban*, and Rembrandt’s *Head of a Girl*.

date they have amassed more than 220 paintings and drawings by important 17th-century Dutch artists, including 17 Rembrandts and the only Vermeer in private hands. “This was my taste, the Dutch Golden Age, and this was my passion from the time I was a child. And I had capital. It’s like the Holy Trinity for an art collector,” Kaplan says. “And it’s a lethal combination.”

Since 2017, after years of anonymously lending works to museums, Kaplan has been taking highlights from his Leiden Collection (named for the birthplace of—who else?—Rembrandt) on a world tour, with dedicated shows at the Louvre and in Abu Dhabi, and at institutions in Shanghai and Beijing. This month the Leiden Collection makes its American debut at the Norton Museum of Art in West Palm Beach. More than 70 works—including all those aforementioned Rembrandts and that Vermeer, plus paintings by Carel Fabritius (recently of *The Goldfinch* fame), Ferdinand Bol, Frans Hals, and Jan Steen—are included in what will be the largest show of privately owned Dutch 17th-century art ever held in the United States.

It’s not as if these paintings are simply coming off the walls of one of his residences. Some collectors acquire masterpieces for personal enjoyment, but that was never Kaplan’s intent. “We can’t live with them. The whole purpose is for them to be lent out,” he says. “They have to be shared. If you think about how many decades of enjoyment I have had from this artist, part of that evangelical mission is giving back to Rembrandt.” T&C



YOU'RE INTO WHAT?

In July, Barbie collectors mourned the unexpected deaths of Mario Paglino and Gianni Grossi, the duo known for transforming the Mattel dolls into feathered and bejeweled haute couture works of art, which sold for thousands of dollars.

A self-professed superfan from Houston has 244 in her collection.