

Sotheby's to offer Rembrandt's Young Lion Resting from The Leiden Collection

Tuesday, November 4, 2025



This February, Sotheby's will offer for sale a masterpiece of draughtsmanship: Rembrandt's Young Lion Resting estimated \$15-20m.

Capturing the power, poise and restless vitality of this majestic creature, this extraordinary work — a rare example of its kind in Rembrandt's oeuvre — stands among the most important Old Master drawings to come to auction in recent decades. It is also the most significant drawing by Rembrandt to come to auction in a generation.

The only depiction of an animal by Rembrandt remaining in private hands, the drawing has resided for over two decades in the acclaimed Leiden Collection — among the most important private collections of 17th-century Dutch and Flemish art in the world, and home to no fewer than 17 paintings by Rembrandt as well as the only works by Vermeer and Carel Fabritius to remain in private hands. Encapsulating the qualities of power, nobility and stateliness for which the lion has been revered universally throughout history with proceeds destined to benefit [Panthera](#), the world's leading organization devoted to the conservation of wild cats.

Although Rembrandt's interest in the king of beasts was clearly pronounced, drawings by him of this subject are extremely rare: only six Rembrandt drawings of lions are currently known, and of those, Young Lion Resting constitutes the only example in private hands: two drawings — closely related to the present one and thought to depict the same animal — are held in the collection of the British Museum; with three additional pen and wash drawings of lions housed in the Louvre, the Boijmans Van Beuningen Museum, and the Rijksmuseum.

When Dr. Thomas S. Kaplan, Founder of Panthera and Founder of The Leiden Collection, acquired the drawing in 2005, Young Lion Resting represented his very first Rembrandt purchase — marking the beginnings of a collection which has since grown to become one of the most important private collections of Dutch Golden Age art in private hands today. Jon Ayers, Board Chair of Panthera, subsequently became a co-owner of the work.

As details of the sale of Young Lion Resting are today revealed, the work itself will be exhibited in Sotheby's galleries in Paris, back in the city where it was exhibited in 2017 at the Louvre. From Paris, the drawing will travel to New York, then to London, then to Abu Dhabi (where it was also exhibited in 2019 at Louvre Abu Dhabi), then to Hong Kong, and finally to Saudi Arabia, before it is offered during Sotheby's Masters Week Sales in New York next February.

Rembrandt would have been in his early to mid-thirties when he executed the work — at a time when he was already well established in Amsterdam, producing dramatic portraits and history paintings, including many of the most innovative and theatrical compositions he ever created. In Young Lion Resting, the animal is depicted in three-quarter view, wearing a leash around its neck, suggesting — in a way that the immediacy of the image would seem to corroborate — that it was drawn from life. It is rendered in exquisite detail in every stroke, conveying not just the lion's form, but its inner life as well, and the quiet intensity that speaks to the true essence of the creature. The drawing pulses with life, capturing the poise, power and composure of this king of animals — its gaze piercing and unwavering, and its restless energy captured most keenly in the animal's left paw, which Rembrandt sketches in two different positions as he establishes its ideal placement. The young lion is both at rest and in movement, calmly observing yet also poised as if about to strike, the clarity and power of its focused gaze both beautiful and awe-inspiring.

The opportunity to see a live lion — and to draw it from life — would only have occurred relatively rarely in 17th-century Europe, and Rembrandt surely would have grasped any such opportunity with great enthusiasm. His fascination with curiosities and exotica is well known, as the inventories taken of the contents of his own home demonstrate. Rembrandt collected these objects so that he could use them as motifs in his paintings. This could also explain why the master would have wanted to study how to make truly lifelike drawings of lions — a creature that features prominently in various biblical and historical stories that he depicted in his paintings and prints.

Where exactly Rembrandt might have come across this lion remains unknown, yet it was most likely in one of the various private menageries that existed in the Netherlands at that time. Some such collections of exotic animals were established by aristocrats, much as one might form an assemblage of unusual shells, minerals or other curiosities. Others were kept for commercial reasons, and constituted popular attractions that people paid well to visit. One of the latter is presumably where Rembrandt must have seen the elephant of which he made three outstanding drawings at around this time (two now in the Albertina in Vienna, the other in the British Museum). But whereas the travels around Europe of that elephant are well documented, the story of the lion seen in this remarkable drawing remains unknown.

In addition to this small group of drawings of lions and elephants, Rembrandt produced a few more studies of animals in pen and ink — including two drawings of pigs in the Louvre and the British Museum — and a remarkable depiction of birds of paradise, also in the Louvre.

Prior to coming to sale, *Young Lion Resting* has been included in various exhibitions of The Leiden Collection around the world, most recently in *From Rembrandt to Vermeer: Masterpieces from The Leiden Collection*, shown at Amsterdam's H'ART Museum from April-August 2025. Before entering The Leiden Collection, the drawing enjoyed a similarly interesting and illustrious history, having once belonged to Jean-Jacques de Boissieu, a late 18th century French artist and engraver celebrated for his detailed landscapes and printmaking and, later on, in the 1960s, to Robert Lebel, the Paris-based art historian, critic, and early champion of Surrealism.

Main Image: Rembrandt Harmensz. van Rijn, *Young Lion Resting*, ca. 1638–42,
Black chalk with white chalk heightening and grey wash on brown laid paper, 11.5 × 15 cm estimate: \$15-20m