

# OBSERVER

## Dutch Golden Age Treasures from Thomas Kaplan's Leiden Collection Take Center Stage in West Palm Beach

The exhibition situates Rembrandt alongside contemporaries like Jan Lievens and Vermeer, offering a fuller picture of the era's creative energies.

By [Dian Parker](#) · 01/01/26 8:00am



Rembrandt, *Unconscious Patient (Allegory of Smell)*, 1624-1625. Oil on panel, inset into an 18th-century panel, 12 1/2 x 10 in.

Courtesy the Norton Museum of Art and the Leiden Collection, New York

Rembrandt's ability to see into a person and express the stories of their lives is extraordinary. He approaches his subjects with wonder, using the brush to lead him into each subject's soul. Just look at his early series of the five senses, the "Allegory of the Senses" paintings: character studies of quack doctors in the act of examining their patients. Painted when he was only 18, the works not only display his luscious, controlled ability with paint and color but his people are each strikingly individual, their facial expressions intricate, humorous and storied. In *Unconscious Patient (Allegory of Smell)*, each of the characters tells a rich and detailed story. The patient has fainted, an old nurse tries to revive him with smelling salts, while the barber-surgeon looks on, wearing gold chains and a richly adorned coat with pearl buttons. His cheeks and nose are ruddy as if he loves his drink. It is an astounding painting, as are the other two, *Allegory of Touch* and *Allegory of Hearing*, currently on view at the Norton Museum.

The three paintings are privately owned by Dr. Thomas S. Kaplan and his wife Daphne as part of the Leiden Collection, named after Rembrandt's birthplace. For the last twenty years, they have purchased 220 paintings and drawings, focusing on 17th-century Dutch artists. And that's not all. Their collection serves as a "lending library" with the intent that the work be seen by people all over the world. Since 2017, selections from the Leiden Collection have been exhibited in museums: the Louvre in Paris, Beijing and Shanghai, Moscow and St. Petersburg, the Louvre Abu Dhabi and Amsterdam. (Kaplan is founder and former executive chairman of Panthera, the global leader in big cat conservation, and is auctioning off at Sotheby's Rembrandt's powerful drawing, *Young Lion Resting*, on February 4, 2026, in the Master Works on Paper from Five Centuries sale. The pre-sale estimate is \$15-20 million; all proceeds will go to Panthera.)

The exhibition in West Palm Beach is elegant and reserved, backdropped by deep burgundy walls and tasteful labels. There are 11 themed sections. The first is the artists in their studios, along with their tools and books. Other sections are daily life, card games, music and history paintings that depict biblical stories, mythology and allegories. A stunning painting by Carel Fabritius, student of Rembrandt's, is of the Old Testament story *Hagar and the Angel*—one of only five portrayals of history by Fabritius still in existence. His life and work were destroyed in a tragic gunpowder explosion in Delft in 1654. Fabritius captures the shining moment the angel appears to answer the tormented pleas of a mother over her suffering child. The light on the angelic being's face and robe accentuates the woman's white blouse, clasped hands and weeping face. The work shows the greatness blooming in an artist who unfortunately young, at only 32.



Carel Fabritius, *Hagar and the Angel*, 1645. Oil on canvas, 62 x 53 9/16 in. Courtesy the Norton Museum of Art and the Leiden Collection, New York

Rembrandt painted over 50 self-portraits, a chronicle of his life and a continued study in self-analysis. This scrutiny of self enabled him to see deeply into his subjects. In the Norton exhibit, there is *Self-Portrait with Shaded Eyes*, painted when he was only 23. With his portraits of aging men and women, you can feel the weight of years they carry and the drama of a long life. *Bust of a Bearded Old Man*, painted when Rembrandt was 27, is filled with such compassion, almost love, that it can bring tears to your eyes.

There are so many arresting works in the show: 70 works by 27 artists. Framed by arched burgundy curtains is the magisterial painting by Rembrandt, *Minerva in Her Study*, 1635. Another beauty is the tender innocence in his *Young Girl in a Gold-Trimmed Cloak*, 1632, the trim of her cloak matching the gold earrings and auburn curls. Other important Dutch artists from that time are represented: Jan Steen, Frans van Mieris, Frans Hals and others. Jan Lievens' self-portrait is another stunner. Painted when he was 22, it is hard to believe someone so young could portray himself so deeply in a portrait. The slightly parted lips, the first blush of a mustache, long wild hair, an almost frightened look in his eyes, all convey the bewilderment of youth. Another exceptional work is by Vermeer, *Young Girl Seated at a Virginal*—the only example of the artist's work still definitively in private hands.



Jan Lievens, *Self-Portrait*, 1629-1630. Oil on panel, 16 9/16 x 14 9/16 in. Courtesy the Norton Museum of Art and the Leiden Collection, New York

The Dutch Golden Age of painting was achieved in part because the Dutch East India Company, established in 1602 and the West East India Company in 1621, enabled the empire's expansion through their maritime fleet. The year 2025 marks the 400th anniversary of the founding of the island of Manhattan by the Dutch, which they called New Amsterdam. The journeys these Dutch paintings must have traveled. The countries, the hands they passed through, the ships, trains, airplanes, the money exchanged, the acquisitions, scholarship, copies, restoration, the renown. The subjects in the paintings would be stunned and the painters millionaires. Aren't we lucky they are being shared with us.

**"Art and Life in Rembrandt's Time: Masterpieces from The Leiden Collection" is at the Norton Museum of Art in West Palm Beach through March 29, 2026.**



Rembrandt, *Bust of a Bearded Old Man*, 1633. Oil on paper, mounted on panel, 31/2 x 21/2 in. Courtesy the Norton Museum of Art and the Leiden Collection, New York