

Sotheby's to bring coveted Rembrandt lion drawing to Diriyah



Rembrandt Harmensz. van Rijn, 'Young Lion Resting,' ca. 1638–42, Black chalk with white chalk heightening and grey wash on brown laid paper, 115 x 150 mm. (Courtesy of Sotheby's)

DUBAI: Later this month, Sotheby's will bring to Saudi Arabia what it describes as the most important Rembrandt drawing to appear at auction in 50 years. Estimated at \$15–20 million, “Young Lion Resting” comes to market from The Leiden Collection, one of the world's most important private collections of 17th-century Dutch and Flemish art.

The drawing will be on public view at Diriyah's Bujairi Terrace from Jan. 24 to 25, alongside the full contents of “Origins II” — Sotheby's forthcoming second auction in Saudi Arabia — ahead of its offering at Sotheby's New York on Feb. 4, 2026. The entire proceeds from the sale will benefit Panthera, the world's leading organization dedicated to the conservation of wild cats. The work is being sold by The Leiden Collection in partnership with its co-owner, philanthropist Jon Ayers, the chairman of the board of Panthera.

Established in 2006, Panthera was founded by the late wildlife biologist Dr. Alan Rabinowitz and Dr. Thomas S. Kaplan. The organization is actively engaged in the Middle East, where it is spearheading the reintroduction of the critically endangered Arabian leopard to AlUla, in partnership with the Royal Commission for AlUla.

“Young Lion Resting” is one of only six known Rembrandt drawings of lions and the only example remaining in private hands. Executed when Rembrandt was in his early to mid-thirties, the work captures the animal’s power and restless energy with striking immediacy, suggesting it was drawn from life. Long before Rembrandt sketched a lion in 17th-century Europe, lions roamed northwest Arabia, their presence still echoed in AlUla’s ancient rock carvings and the Lion Tombs of Dadan.

For Dr. Kaplan, the drawing holds personal significance as his first Rembrandt acquisition. From 2017 to 2024, he served as chairman of the International Alliance for the Protection of Heritage, of which Saudi Arabia is a founding member.

The Diriyah exhibition will also present, for the first time, the full range of works offered in “Origins II,” a 64-lot sale of modern and contemporary art, culminating in an open-air auction on Jan. 31 at 7.30 pm.