

## Rembrandt, a record-breaking lion: it is his most valuable drawing ever sold at auction

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Rembrandt's Young Lion has reached \$18 million at Sotheby's New York, setting a new record for a drawing by the artist: it is his most expensive work on paper ever sold at auction. A unique work, in terms of history and quality, that combines market, artistic research and nature conservation, because proceeds from the sale will support Panther

A drawing by **Rembrandt van Rijn** (Leiden, 1606 - Amsterdam, 1669) depicting a **young lion** has made **art market history** by becoming **the Dutch artist's most expensive work on paper ever sold at auction**. The sheet, known as *Young lion resting* ("Young lion resting"), fetched **\$18 million** (15.25 million euros) at Sotheby's New York on Feb. 4, far surpassing the previous record for a Rembrandt drawing, which stood at \$3.7 million. A result described as extraordinary by insiders, confirming the growing attention of collectors to the graphic masterpieces of the great masters and the independent value of the drawing as an accomplished work.

Created in the late 1930s and early 1940s, the *Young Lion at Rest* was offered with an estimate of between \$15 million and \$20 million (€12.7 million to €17 million), a range that already hinted at the work's exceptional nature. Prior to the sale, the drawing was the subject of a lengthy international tour that took it on display in Paris, London, Abu Dhabi, Hong Kong, and Diriyah. This route reflects Sotheby's strategy of strengthening its global presence, particularly in Saudi Arabia, after holding its first auction in the country last year.

The work occupies a **very special position** in Rembrandt's output. It is in fact **the only depiction of an animal** by the Dutch master still **remaining in private hands** and the first, after more than a century, to appear on the market. For more than two decades, the drawing has been part of the **Leiden** Collection, one of the world's most important private collections devoted to 17th-century Dutch and Flemish art. The collection includes at least seventeen paintings by Rembrandt and also holds the only work by Johannes Vermeer still in a private collection, shaping itself as an absolute benchmark for the study of the Dutch Golden Age.



Rembrandt van Rijn, *Young Lion at Rest* (black chalk and gray watercolor, brightened with white, on light brown washed paper, 115 x 150 mm)

The young lion depicted by Rembrandt is caught in a pose of only apparent rest. The drawing, clearly **executed from life**, renders all the power, nobility and restless vitality of the animal. With just a few strokes of chalk and quick brush strokes, the artist succeeds in **blending direct observation of nature** with an **extraordinary capacity for psychological penetration**. The lion's gaze, turned slightly to the left of the viewer, concentrates a tension that makes the image at once calm and charged with energy, as if the animal could snap at any moment.

From a technical point of view, the drawing is characterized by an **extraordinary spontaneity of execution**, particularly evident in the left front paw, drawn in two different positions. This solution reveals the very process of observation and drawing, restoring the immediacy of the artist's first glance at the subject. In a few lines Rembrandt does not merely describe the lion's outward appearance, but seems to grasp its deeper essence, transforming the animal study into a true portrait, comparable in intensity to those devoted to human subjects.

The choice of drawing as a medium of expression is central to the work's impact. Freed from the layered mediation of painting, the image records the artist's most direct gesture, allowing the viewer to share in the original act of observation. It is a concentrated moment, charged with tension and awareness, that makes *Young Lion at Rest* one of the most intense sheets in Rembrandt's entire graphic production.

Proceeds from the sale go to support **Panthera**, the world's leading organization dedicated to the **conservation of wild felines**. The link between the work and this cause reinforces the symbolic value of the drawing, which combines the historical image of the lion, an animal that has always been charged with cultural and political significance, with the concrete protection of today's endangered species. When Dr. **Thomas S. Kaplan**, founder of Panthera and the Leiden Collection, acquired *Young Lion at Rest* in 2005, the drawing represented his **first purchase of a Rembrandt work**. That acquisition marked **the beginning of a collecting journey** that would lead to the creation of one of the most important private collections of Dutch Golden Age art in existence today. Over time, the Leiden Collection has also become known for its scholarly approach to the study of works and a policy of lending that has enabled museums around the world to exhibit masterpieces rarely accessible to the public.

Panthera was founded in 2006 by the shared vision of renowned wildlife biologist Alan Rabinowitz and philanthropist Thomas Kaplan. The organization's mission is to secure a future for wild felines and the vast territories on which they depend by promoting coexistence between humans and animals and protecting natural landscapes through science-driven initiatives. Panthera's work today represents the most comprehensive and structured global effort to conserve the forty existing species of wild cats. The organization works with local communities to combat poaching, combat illegal wildlife trafficking and safeguard critical habitats. In parallel, it conducts intensive outreach to raise awareness of the threats facing big cats and to ensure their survival for future generations. The organization can count on more than seventy field scientists with doctorate- or master's-level training, as well as law enforcement experts from fields such as the armed forces, intelligence services, police, and criminological sciences, setting itself up as a unique entity in the landscape of targeted species protection.



Rembrandt van Rijn, *Young Lion at Rest*