



*Schatborn, Peter. "Young Lion Resting" (2017). In The Leiden Collection Catalogue, 4th ed. via Sotheby's*

Yesterday, Sotheby's oversaw the record \$18 million sale of a drawing by Rembrandt: one of 6 drafts he made of lions, and the only one to have resided in private hands.

Those hands belong to Dr. Thomas S. Kaplan and his wife, who along with standing foremost among the world's private Rembrandt collectors, ride in the vanguard of global wildlife conservation on behalf of the very cat the drawing so vividly depicts.

Called *Young Lions Resting*, Rembrandt depicts with superb draftsmanship the languid, fearless pose of the lion through loose, confident strokes, particularly in the modeling of the lion's paws, and a controlled shading that brings its gaze to life.

Dr. Kaplan, who's [spoken to GNN before](#) about his work at Panthera, explained how it was the most he and his wife had ever paid for an object after they embarked upon their anonymous journey of collection Rembrandt and other

Dutch/Flemish masters pieces in 2003.

Founder of both the [Leiden Collection](#) of Dutch and Flemish master works and [Panthera](#), the world's leading conservation organization dedicated exclusively to wild cats big and small, Dr. Kaplan has been able to synergistically marry these two passions, leveraging one to fund the other, as all proceeds from the record-setting, [\\$17.9 million sale](#) will help ensure the lion survives long beyond both Rembrandt's time, and our own.

"We recognized immediately the synergy, as my wife told me when I asked her opinion of it when I took her to see it before buying it: she responded 'it's a Rembrandt, it's a lion, and it's beautiful; if it's not for you then who's it for?'" Kaplan told GNN.

Only 6 drawings of lions by Rembrandt are currently known. *Young Lion Resting* is the first drawing by the master to come to the market in a century, and the \$17.9 million sale price sets a new record for a drawing by Rembrandt by almost \$15 million.

Kaplan founded Panthera along with renowned and late conservationist Dr. Alan Rabinowitz just one year after he bought the painting in 2005. Highlighting the plight of the lion across its entire native range, the sale of *Young Lion Resting* at Sotheby's was paired with a faithful reproduction entitled *Young Lion Vanished*, wherein the animal Rembrandt so skillfully brought to life on the paper is replaced by a void—a reality on our Earth across 95% of the lion's former range.

"Is it savable? Yes, it is, and with much larger landscapes than with the tiger in India. But, in 26 out of the 48 countries through which it roamed, it's now extinct," says Dr. Kaplan, who's involvement in Panthera goes far beyond his role as its billionaire philanthropist founder, and stretches well into the scientific.



*Young Lion Resting (top) Young Lion Vanished (bottom) – credit, supplied by Panthera*

While Panthera has achieved incredible results protecting leopards and jaguars, Dr. Kaplan says that as regards the lion, its programs are still about “playing defense.”

“The lion is not there not, but it could be. I don’t believe it will ever be extinct in the wild, but it might come to exist only in fortresses, and we want to see more connectivity.”

*Young Lion Resting* was co-owned with the chair of Panthera's board of directors, Jon Ayer, who's [spoken with GNN multiple times](#), and who provided a statement to mark the sale.

"The pulse of life that Rembrandt captured in this lion's gaze continues to beat today through our conservation field programs," said Ayers. "This sale provides Panthera with critical resources to combat poaching and habitat loss globally, ensuring that the majesty Rembrandt admired in the 17th century survives well into the 21st and beyond."

Those resources come as the organization he chairs and Kaplan founded will celebrate its 20th anniversary this year. The auction proceeds will support science-directed initiatives fostering human-wild cat coexistence and critical landscape protection in some 40 countries across four continents.

"We probably spend 80% of our time working with people to ensure that we've protected them from the human-animal conflict that usually precedes the slaughter of the animals. If people don't have to kill lions, usually they don't, but if all of your material wellbeing is wrapped up in a cow or a goat, you're not going to take that loss stoically," Dr. Kaplan remarked empathetically.

"You're going to make sure that doesn't happen again. On the other hand if you create good fences, generally speaking people do not want to kill the cat."

Kaplan told GNN that among those whose job it is to know within the federal government, there is a belief that if Panthera can't save a wildcat, no one can. If that's true, then this record Rembrandt auction suggests the lion is in a safe pair of paws.