

lifestyles

MAGAZINES

\$18 million from the auction of a Rembrandt drawing donated by philanthropist Tom Kaplan to the world's leading conservation organization dedicated exclusively to the protection of wild cats



Sotheby's early February, 2026 has overseen a record-breaking \$18 million sale of a rare Rembrandt drawing, with the proceeds earmarked entirely for global wildlife conservation.

The work, *Young Lion Resting*, is one of only six known lion studies by Rembrandt and the only one to have remained in private hands until now. The \$17.9 million hammer price sets a new record for a drawing by the Dutch master, surpassing the previous high by nearly \$15 million.

The drawing was owned by Dr. Thomas S. Kaplan and his wife, Daphne Recanati Kaplan, who are among the world's foremost private collectors of Rembrandt and the founders of the Leiden Collection of Dutch and Flemish masterworks.

Kaplan is also the founder of Panthera, the world's leading conservation organization dedicated exclusively to protecting wild cats. In a rare convergence of art and advocacy, all proceeds from the sale will go directly to Panthera to support efforts to ensure the long-term survival of lions in the wild.

Rendered with loose, confident strokes and subtle shading, *Young Lion Resting* captures the animal in a relaxed yet fearless pose, with particular virtuosity in the modeling of its paws and the intensity of its gaze.

Kaplan has said it was the most expensive object he and his wife ever purchased when they acquired it in 2005, at the start of what was then an anonymous journey into collecting Rembrandt and other Dutch and Flemish masters.

He recalled his wife's reaction when he asked her opinion before buying it: "It's a Rembrandt, it's a lion, and it's beautiful. If it's not for you, then who's it for?"

The sale marks the first time a Rembrandt drawing has come to market in over a century. To underscore the conservation message, the auction was paired with a reproduction titled *Young Lion Vanished*, in which the lion is replaced by an empty void, symbolizing the fact that lions have disappeared from roughly 95 percent of their historic range.

Lions are now extinct in 26 of the 48 countries where they once roamed.

Kaplan founded Panthera in 2006 alongside the late conservationist Dr. Alan Rabinowitz, one year after purchasing the drawing.

While the organization has achieved notable success protecting species such as jaguars and leopards, Kaplan has said lion conservation remains largely defensive, focused on preventing further losses through habitat protection, anti-poaching efforts, and reducing human-wildlife conflict.

Much of Panthera's work centers on helping local communities protect their livelihoods so that killing lions is no longer seen as a necessity.

Young Lion Resting was co-owned with Jon Ayers, chair of Panthera's board of directors, who said the sale would provide critical resources to combat poaching and habitat loss worldwide.

As Panthera approaches its 20th anniversary, the funds will support science-driven programs that promote coexistence between people and wild cats across more than 40 countries on four continents.

For Kaplan, the sale reflects a belief that cultural heritage and conservation need not compete.

With this record-setting auction, a Rembrandt masterpiece has been transformed into a living investment in the future of the very animal it depicts, helping ensure that the lion survives long beyond Rembrandt's time—and our own.

Photo: Philanthropist Tom Kaplan with Lifestyles Magazine/Meaningful Influence founder Gabriel Erem