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A Record For Rembrandt as Drawing Fetches \$18 Million at Auction

The sale places it among the most valuable “Old Masters” works ever sold and was a lead piece during a week of auctions spanning centuries and millenia of art

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Rembrandt's "Young Lion Resting"
COURTESY OF SOTHEBY'S

A 17th-century work by Rembrandt sold for \$17.86 million this week at a Sotheby's Old Masters auction, setting a record for a drawing by the Dutch artist.

"Young Lion Resting" is thought to be only one of six Rembrandt lion drawings in existence, with the other five in European museum collections. According to Sotheby's, the artist sketched the piece in his mid-30s when he was in the prime of his career. Until the sale, the painting was held within the Leiden Collection, which is considered one of the most important private holdings of 17th-century Dutch and Flemish art.

"This extraordinary drawing has captured the hearts of everyone who has seen it, a true testament to Rembrandt's genius and ability to breathe life into the spirit of this magnificent creature," said Gregory Rubinstein, Sotheby's head of Old Master drawings in a news release. The buyer was not identified.

The proceeds from the Tuesday sale in New York will benefit wildcat preservation charity Panthera. The organization is chaired by one of the drawing's previous owners, Jon Ayers.

The Old Masters series includes eight auctions throughout the week, featuring a variety of important works spanning centuries and millennia of painted and written art.

Other completed sales include another piece from the Leiden Collection, "Allegory of the Five Senses"—a 1641 painting by Dutch artist Jan Lievens. The larger-format piece was executed, notably, when Lievens was a teenager and sold for \$2.612 million.

A 1480 portrait by Italian artist Biagio d'Antonio far exceeded an estimate of \$800,000 to \$1.2 million, selling for \$2.307 million. The piece is thought to be one of only three portraits the painter ever created and is the only one remaining in private hands.

Among the more historically significant pieces on offer is a Jewish High Holiday prayer book completed in 1415. Commissioned by a wealthy Austrian family, it held great significance to the Vienna Jewish community and was eventually bought by the Rothschild family. The book was looted during the Nazi occupation of Austria and ultimately went unrecognized for decades as it sat in the Austrian National Library. The single-lot sale will run Thursday and the piece carries an estimate of \$5 million to \$7 million.

Rounding out Thursday's activity will be a 12-lot sale from the Lester L. Weindling Collection, highlighting more "masterpiece"-level work from Dutch and Flemish artists. A 17th-century still life by Amsterdam painter Jan Jansz carries an estimate of \$2 million to \$3 million, while a river scenery painting by artist Salomon van Ruysdael from the mid-1600s is estimated to sell between \$1.8 million and \$2.5 million.

The week of sales will conclude Friday with an auction of a number of antiquities and paintings dating as far back as 2600 B.C. Items on offer include a marble figure from the Early Bronze Age (currently selling at \$65,000) and a striking 16th-century wooden panel depiction of multiple saints and Christian theological scenes commissioned for a Spanish church (currently selling at \$22,000).