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This Masterpiece by Rembrandt's Star Pupil Has a New Owner

The painting was previously stolen from the Rothschild family in World War II.



Willem Drost, *Man with a Plumed Red Beret* (1654). Photo: courtesy Agnews Gallery/Leiden Collection.

by **Richard Whiddington** • March 13, 2026

- **Willem Drost's *Man With a Plumed Red Beret* sold at TEFAF Maastricht to the Leiden Collection.**
- **The 1654 *tronie* highlights Drost's Rembrandt-influenced style and growing scholarly appreciation of his brief career.**
- **The Leiden Collection plans to make the painting accessible to the public.**

There's a black-and-white photograph from 1945 of American soldiers stood outside the salt mines of Altaussee, Austria, propping up a pair of oil paintings. *The Art of Painting* (1666–68) draws the eye first, its drapery and checkerboard floor immediately identifying it as a **Vermeer**. In the foreground, a **Monuments Man** holds a work by Vermeer's contemporary, **Willem Drost**, which offers a thickly bearded man leaning forward with an intense expression.

That work, *Man With a Plumed Red Beret* (1654), has now joined the Leiden Collection's [encyclopedic roster](#) of 17th-century Dutch painting after selling on March 13 at **TEFAF Maastricht**, through **Agnews Gallery** for an undisclosed fee. Since its founding in 2003, the **Leiden Collection**, named for Rembrandt's birthplace, has steadily amassed paintings by the Dutch master and his circle, with its founder **Thomas Kaplan** calling the Drost a "capstone acquisition."

"This exquisite painting displays how Drost, like his teacher, could capture a sitter's distinct individuality with inner life and contemplative potency," the billionaire philanthropist and financier said over email. "[The painting] shows Drost's own unique sensibility, evident in his carefully modulated brushwork and striking use of color."



Max Eder and American Monuments Men recovering Johannes Vermeer's *The Art of Painting* and Willem Drost's *Man With a Plumed Red Beret* from the salt mines of Altaussee, Austria, 1945. Photo: courtesy Agnews Gallery.

Though less well known that some of Rembrandt's other pupils, such as **Ferdinand Bol** and **Carel Fabritius**, Drost's reputation has risen in recent decades on the back of scholarship acknowledging the range and depth of his painting. Part of this oversight has been down to the Amsterdam-born painter's tragic biography: he died of pneumonia in Venice in 1659 at the age of 25. *Man With a Plumed Red Beret* was painted after Drost had left Rembrandt's workshop and shortly before his departure for Italy.

As with most Drost works from his latter Amsterdam period, the man's unusual dress marks it as a *tronie*, a depiction of a figure in an exaggerated dress or pose. Drost offers a man in motion, one hand curves at his hip, the other gestures performatively, and he seems on the cusp of speaking. As the **Rijksmuseum** researcher, Jonathan Bikker, noted: "Drost demonstrates a command of the 'rough manner' that is indistinguishable from Rembrandt's own work of the mid-1650s."

The painting was sold by the Swiss financier **Jacqui Safra**, who had acquired the painting from the **Rothschild** family in the 1990s. In a statement, Safra said the Leiden Collection was the ideal home for *Man With a Plumed Red Beret* and that there was "delightful poetry in the master, Rembrandt, and one of his greatest pupils, Drost, reuniting after some 400 years."



Installation view of "Art and Life in Rembrandt's Time: Masterpieces from the Leiden Collection" (2025). Courtesy of the Norton Museum of Art, West Palm Beach.

The work passed through some of the most celebrated Dutch and German collections before ending up in the hands of the Rothschild family in the second half of the 19th century. Earmarked for a place at the **Führer Museum** in Linz, it was stolen from the Rothschilds during World War II, then returned following the exploits of the Monuments Men.

The Leiden Collection boasts more than 220 works, including the world's largest number of Rembrandts in private hands (17), and aims to build bridges between generations through Dutch Golden Age painting. The collection does not have a home base and instead proactively loans works out to museums for the purposes of education and scholarship—most recently, a 70-work show at the **Norton Museum of Art** in West Palm Beach.

“We will of course make *Man With a Plumed Red Beret* accessible to the public in exactly the same way,” Kaplan said. “The aim is to share these treasures for all the world to see and enjoy.”