

Agnews Gallery and The Leiden Collection Announce the Sale and Acquisition of Willem Drost's *Man with a Plumed Red Beret*, at The European Fine Art Fair (TEFAF Maastricht)

A Singular Masterpiece of the Rembrandt School



WILLEM DROST (Amsterdam 1633 – 1659 Venice)

Man with a Plumed Red Beret

Signed and dated (centre right) 'Drost 1654'

Oil on unlined canvas

40 1/2 × 36 1/4 in. (102.9 × 92.1 cm)

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LONDON — Agnews Gallery is proud to announce the sale of Willem Drost's exceptional 1654 oil on canvas, *Man with a Plumed Red Beret*, to The Leiden Collection, the world's foremost private assemblage of Rembrandt and Rembrandt School paintings. Willem Drost (1633–1659), who was not previously represented in The Collection, was among Rembrandt's most gifted and enigmatic pupils, studying with the master in the early 1650s. Throughout his brief career, tragically cut short when he died of pneumonia in Venice at age 25, Drost created powerful and exquisitely executed portrayals of the human figure. The entry of this masterpiece into The Leiden Collection marks a momentous event from both a curatorial and educational standpoint.

Rarely do artists capture the emotional energy that Drost achieves in this compelling image. The bearded man's forceful pose commands the viewer's attention. As he leans forward, gazing intently to the side, he gestures with an open hand in the opposite direction. He appears poised

to speak—but to whom and why we do not know. The intensity also stems from Drost’s vigorous brushwork, his mastery of light, and his dramatic use of colour in modelling the brilliant red, feathered beret, echoing scholar Jonathan Bikker’s broader insight about the artist’s concomitant filiation with, and distinctiveness from, Rembrandt: “In *Man with a Plumed Red Beret*, Drost demonstrates a command of the ‘rough manner’ that is indistinguishable from Rembrandt’s own work of the mid-1650s, yet he maintains a distinct, cooler emotional distance that is uniquely his own.” The sitter’s fanciful wardrobe, which is unrelated to 17th-century Dutch dress, identifies the work as a *tronie*—indeed the largest group of extant Rembrandtesque paintings by Drost are his *tronies*.

Long admired by collectors and scholars, the painting enjoys a distinguished provenance. It passed through the hands of prominent Dutch and German 18th- and 19th-century collectors such as Maarseveen, Winckler, and Ritterich. From the second half of the 19th century, it belonged to four generations of the great Rothschild banking and collecting family, including Baron James de Rothschild in Paris—who also owned Rembrandt’s *Standard Bearer*, purchased by the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam in 2022.

The property of some of the greatest collectors of the past four centuries, the work was also coveted and stolen by the Nazis, destined for the Führer Museum in Linz. In a now-famous photograph taken after Hitler’s defeat, the American Monuments Men can be seen carrying the painting to safety next to Vermeer’s famed *The Art of Painting*, now in the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna. *Man with a Plumed Red Beret* was later returned to the Rothschild family, with whom it would remain until the 1990s when purchased by Jacqui Safra of the Safra banking dynasty.



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.

Mr. Safra writes on the sale of his painting: “As a proud steward of this magnificent masterpiece for the past three decades, it is with great satisfaction that Drost’s *Man with a Plumed Red Beret* now joins Tom and Daphne’s astonishing Leiden Collection and its magnificent Rembrandts. There is delightful poetry in the master, Rembrandt, and one of his greatest pupils, Drost, reuniting after some 400 years to add strength to strength in this magnificent and brilliantly curated collection. I look forward to seeing this jewel in future exhibitions. I cannot think of a better home for my much-beloved portrait.”

Dr. Arthur K. Wheelock, Jr., Senior Advisor to The Leiden Collection, observed: “*Man with a*

Plumed Red Beret is a generational acquisition—similar to The Collection’s purchase of Carel Fabritius’ *Hagar and the Angel* in 2011. This masterpiece by Drost, one of the very greatest of Rembrandt’s pupils and previously unrepresented in our holdings, perfectly complements The Leiden Collection’s standing as a unique assemblage of Rembrandt and his School. Only in recent decades have scholars fully appreciated Drost’s range and depth, recognizing that his sheer genius as a pupil of Rembrandt is indeed perhaps matched only by Fabritius. Thanks to The Collection’s singular profile as a lending library for Old Masters, this accession ensures that the master’s oeuvre and legacy continue to be studied, admired, and displayed in the broader context of his peers.”

Agnews Gallery: A Legacy of Excellence

Since its founding in 1817, Agnews Gallery has been a cornerstone of the international art market. The gallery has been involved in placing masterpieces in major collections and museums around the world, handling works by, amongst others, Caravaggio, Van Dyck, El Greco, Frans Hals, Poussin, Rembrandt, Rubens, Vermeer, Titian, Turner and Velázquez, including the latter’s *Rokeby Venus* in the National Gallery, London. Agnews continues its 200-year tradition of connecting exceptional artworks with the world’s most discerning collectors.

About The Leiden Collection

The Leiden Collection, founded in 2003 by Franco-American collector Dr. Thomas S. Kaplan and his wife, Daphne Recanati Kaplan, comprises some 220 paintings and drawings and represents one of the largest and most important assemblages of 17th-century Dutch paintings in private hands. The Collection is named after Rembrandt’s native city in honor of the artist’s transcendence and focuses on the works of Rembrandt and his followers, illuminating the personalities and themes that shaped the time period over five generations. The Collection is the most comprehensive representation of the Leiden artists known as *fijnschilders* (“fine manner painters”), who concentrated on painting portraits, genre scenes, and history paintings. To learn more, please visit theleidencollection.com—home to an extensive online catalogue and scholarly resource that features detailed entries on each painting, biographies of artists, and essays by leading scholars.

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