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Thomas Kaplan's 18th Rembrandt is St John on Patmos

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ARTnews
September 28, 2026



Art collector Thomas S. Kaplan.
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Thomas Kaplan, the world's largest **Rembrandt** collector, has by long made a habit of collecting and selling the Dutch artist's work. Now, it has been revealed that the American businessman and owner of the Leiden Collection was in fact the buyer of Rembrandt's *St John on Patmos* (ca. 1660), which sold for $9 million in December last year, according to ***The Art Newspaper***.

Kaplan said he acquired *St John on Patmos*, making it his 18th piece of work by Rembrandt, to preserve the artwork by ultimately "returning to the public domain, a breathtaking late masterwork that has been hidden from sight for over a century" while adding to "the core narrative of our collection." The last time the painting was exhibited was in 1923.

Prior to that, in 1904, the painting was in possession of an American dealer who had attributed it to the Dutch artist Carel Fabritius. But when German art historian and Metropolitan Museum of Art curator Wilhelm Valentiner acquired the work for $525 in 1913, he recognized it as a Rembrandt and kept it for his own personal collection; for many years, Valentiner believed it to be a portrait of Rembrandt's son Titus.

The painting was later bought by Fritz Thyssen, heir to one of Germany's leading industrial families. Thyssen, who was originally a supporter of Adolf Hitler in the 1920s, later became a vehement critic

of the dictator in the late ’30s. By 1941, Thyssen tried to flee from the Nazis, but was caught and sent to the Sachsenhausen and Dachau concentration camps. The Rembrandt was seized but later restituted to him in 1950, at which time he was living in Buenos Aires, Argentina. His grandson, Federico Zichy Thyssen, eventually inherited the painting, which was passed to a family charitable foundation, following his death, in 2014.

When the painting headed to Sotheby’s last year, a routine cleaning revealed a figure that’s been attributed to St John in Patmos because of symbols found in the painting, including a palm tree representing the Greek island of Patmos, as well as an eagle associated with St John.

Arthur Wheelock, the 17th-century Dutch specialist, who closely advises Kaplan, told *The Art Newspaper* that the artist used his son as a model for the painting. “Rembrandt’s decision to ask Titus to model for St John suggests that he felt an underlying connection between his own affection for his son and the evangelist’s place in the Christian story,” Wheelock said.

Earlier this year, in February, Kaplan **sold** Rembrandt’s drawing *Young Lion Resting* for $18 million at auction at Sotheby’s, the proceeds of which supported global wild cat conservation organization Panthera.

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