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Mystery Buyer of $9 Million Misattributed Rembrandt Unmasked
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Rembrandt van Rijn, *St. John on Patmos*, ca. 1661. Photo: Courtesy of the Leiden Collection.

The buyer of a formerly misattributed Rembrandt that hammered for $9 million at a Sotheby's London sale in December 2025 has been revealed to be the world's largest collector of the artist, the *Art Newspaper* reports. Thomas Kaplan, an American businessman and philanthropist, purchased Rembrandt's ca. 1661 *St. John on Patmos* for his Leiden Collection, one of the most internationally significant private troves of seventeenth-century Dutch and Flemish art. The work is the eighteenth by the Dutch master bought by Kaplan in the past two decades.

The painting was mistakenly attributed to Carel Fabritius in 1904 by an American dealer and sold for $160 (equivalent to about $6,000 today). In 1913, Wilhelm Valentiner, a curator at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, identified it as a Rembrandt—one that he believed depicted the artist's son Titus—and purchased it for himself, paying just $525 (roughly $18,000 in 2026 dollars).

Sold in the 1920s to German steel heir Fritz Thyssen, the canvas was among those seized by the Nazis in 1940. It was restored to Thyssen a decade later and passed to his grandson, Federico Zichy Thyssen, on whose 2014 death the painting landed with a charitable family foundation. As the foundation prepared it for auction last year, the work was discovered to instead show St. John on Patmos. Seventeenth-century Dutch art specialist Arthur Wheelock affirmed that Sotheby's attribution of the painting to Rembrandt is now widely accepted.

Kaplan earlier this year sold Rembrandt's ca. 1638–42 drawing *Young Lion Resting* for nearly $18 million, also through Sotheby's, using the proceeds to endow a big-cat conservation fund, which rendered his unmasking as the buyer of the late canvas a bit surprising.

"When a painting as intensely personal as *St John on Patmos* emerges after a hundred years in private hands," Kaplan told the *Art Newspaper*, "the enthusiasm is already built into the sheer rarity of the moment."

The Leiden Collection is expected to announce an autumn 2027 European exhibition that will feature *St. John on Patmos* in its public debut.

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