

Remarks by Dr. Thomas S. Kaplan

*Masterpieces of The Leiden Collection:
The Age of Rembrandt*

– Launch Ceremony –

The Louvre

Paris, France

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Thank you so much, Jean-Luc, for that most generous introduction. In truth, however, the greatest credit for this wonderful event really belongs to you and The Louvre. If the media reception is to be believed, this experiment has been beautifully embraced by your countrymen. What our teams have done together has clearly touched the heart. *Bravo et Merci, Jean-Luc. Bravo et Merci Blaise, Ina, Vincent, Sebastian, Adel, Jean-Francois et toute L'Equipe. Bravo Louvre!*

So it is indeed with great pleasure, amidst the splendour of this most celebrated of venues, and an equally fabulous crowd, that I address all of you...

Your Royal Highnesses, Excellencies, Colleagues, extended Family and dear Friends, and above all my soulmate Daphne, and our children who are our finest Rembrandts...

As most of you know, until very recently, my family has been studious in avoiding being public regarding our collecting. We didn't name the Leiden Collection after ourselves, but for the place of Rembrandt's birth, as an homage. After all, it takes a genius to be Rembrandt, not to collect him. Likewise, we've never lived with our paintings but rather have, as a matter of policy, taken art from the private domain and returned it to the public domain by creating a Lending Library involving some 40 museums. Our anonymity was a deliberate choice. We tend to believe that Charles Saatchi was right when he said the story is not about the collector, but rather the artists. Nothing's changed in that regard. On the other hand, once we made the decision that it was more important to share not just the paintings but also all the information we had on them, and thus "crossed the Rubicon" with our on-line catalogue project with the National Gallery of Washington's great Arthur Wheelock, we knew the anonymous part of our collecting lives would be over. As low-profile as we had been while acquiring paintings at a rate of a painting a week for years, and lending hundreds of pictures, including the Rembrandts and Vermeer you'll see this evening, to imagine that we would not be asked to explain publicly what moved us to go so much against the contemporary zeitgeist in our collecting, would have been delusional. Collecting is a personal thing. But for us, to put it simply, we believe that, to the extent the collector adds value to the story and truly is socially useful, it comes from what they do with their collections, and their advocacy for the artists they love.

If this is beginning to sound like a manifesto, that's because it is one. For tonight marks the beginning of the next and most exciting chapter of Daphne's and my journey as collectors, and our sense of mission to use Old Masters to further the cause of promoting humanism and its noble offspring: tolerance and mutual

respect. Particularly at this very moment, we believe that the promotion of universal values is essential. Cynicism, so much in vogue, simply does not work for us. In fact, we reject it completely. So rather than silently acquiescing to the building of walls or the burning of bridges, we are using the most powerful tools we have, Rembrandt and our passion, to build upon the connections that bind people together rather than tear us apart. It's very idealistic, and an ambitious vision for sure. But perhaps this evening may be seen as a start. As an ambitious man, Napoleon, once said: "A revolution is an idea which has found its bayonets".

Instead of bayonets, we have the powerful brushwork of the Old Masters as our weapon of choice. We do of course have the advantage of waging this campaign with one of the greatest brand names in the world as our calling card. It is really not very hard to be the *évangéliste* of Rembrandt Van Rijn. Especially in the fertile ground of France, the birth place of universal values. Better still, as we head to the National Museum in Beijing as our next stop, we are told that, for the Chinese, Rembrandt is the most revered name among the Old Masters, much as The Louvre itself is their most revered name among museums. The Louvre is the Louvre. It is *sui generis*. Just as Shakespeare is Shakespeare, and Bach is Bach, and Rembrandt is Rembrandt. Some artists are simply so extraordinary that they changed not merely their medium, but in their transcendence, they changed the world. Andre Malraux said that Rembrandt was "the first to touch the soul" with his painting. He clearly broke the bounds of convention and unleashed the freedom of the painter to cast off the classical limitations of expression and aesthetics to illuminate a deeper narrative. Certainly, as a master in the use of light to achieve both literal and figurative illumination, Rembrandt is unequalled. He connected intimately with his subjects' interior life in a distinctly revolutionary way, generations – indeed centuries -- before the advent of impressionism and even expressionism. Goya, Van Gogh, Delacroix, Picasso, Turner, and Bacon all gave tribute to Rembrandt's inspiring liberation. And it continues today in remarkable ways. The great Chinese contemporary artist, Zeng Fanzhi, has told me that his greatest influence was none other than Rembrandt.

As it is said, a picture can speak a thousand words. Can it speak a million words? Of course; in today's world, it can speak a billion words. My dream Rembrandt exhibition is the one we are discussing with Abu Dhabi, using the power of Rembrandt's universal humanity to show the artist in dialogue with everything from antiquities all the way through to illuminated Hebrew manuscripts and the multitude of artists he influenced. We relish the prospect of engaging in the Emirates' – and France's – brave and noble experiment – creating a museum dedicated to celebrating the common bonds of global culture just down the road

from Mosul and Aleppo. There is alas no substitute for hard power in the fight against those who would happily destroy us. But in parallel can there be a better riposte to the cultural cleansing of Palmyra than the sight of French Christians and American Jews joining hands with Gulf Arabs to use soft power not in a clash of civilizations to defeat barbarism, but an alliance of civilizations?

You can see for yourself our idealism beautifully expressed in *The Boy with a Turban* painted by Jan Lievens, the image that graces the cover of this exhibition's catalogue and which you are all invited to take. In addition to its aesthetic beauty is the symbolic beauty of a western prince in oriental dress and the inner beauty that comes from being impactful. Adopting Malraux, if one defines beauty as that which touches the soul, you can understand why Rembrandt – who took this concept even further -- was so ahead of his time. As he showed –often controversially -- Beauty is not always aesthetically kind....nonetheless, it always moves you. Because Beauty is truth. It is this kind of beauty that we believe Dostoyevsky referred to when he wrote “Beauty will save the world.” While art that touches the soul may not alone be able to save the world, perhaps Rembrandt has a tangible role to play in what the Jews call “*tikkun olam*”, “repairing the world.” Daphne and I will happily take that as a first step.

It is not perhaps an accident that my family's greatest passions are wildlife conservation and, now more than ever, harnessing the power of art. Both represent what we seek to teach our children, the aspiration to speak to one's higher self, to make a life over making a living. To put this analogy into context, one of the great naturalists of our age, EO Wilson, drew this exquisite mental picture:

Destroying a tropical rainforest for profit is like burning all the paintings of the Louvre to cook dinner.

Touché!

To combat the war on wildlife, we have built a global alliance that now has a hundred partnerships in more than 50 countries. As we have applied ourselves to wildlife conservation with imagination, so too might we succeed in applying Art to humanism's conservation with equal imagination. It's not impossible. Think about where we are. Americans are tonight launching a campaign from the most iconic French museum to use Dutch paintings to connect us all to Asia and the Middle East.

To conclude, if it sounds like Daphne and I believe we can have it all, it is because we do. All those who believe that we are liberated and free, who are tolerant and generous of spirit, must have it all. We must, together, use every tool – and take every opportunity-- that we can, as French, Dutch, Chinese, Emiratis – who knows, Russians perhaps? – and Americans, to lift our hearts and make it clear that we have all come too far and that we can settle for nothing less.

Merci.