

Press release

Acquisition of *The Denial of Saint Peter* by Louis or Antoine Le Nain thanks to the AXA Group's patronage



Frédéric Mitterrand, the French minister for culture and communication, announces the State's acquisition of *The Denial of Saint Peter* by Louis or Antoine Le Nain for the Musée du Louvre.

A rare and moving example of the Caravaggio school of painting, this masterpiece has an illustrious history and has been long awaited by those intrigued by the Le Nain brothers, whose signed works bear only their surname.

From the outset, the painting stirs up emotion: it depicts the moment of a shocking revelation for the apostle Peter. Distraught, he strives to escape the curious eyes of the servant and soldiers who recognize him as one of Christ's companions. Shortly before being arrested, Jesus had warned the eldest of his disciples that he would deny him three times before dawn: despite his protestations of loyalty, Peter had just responded three times that he did not know him. When a rooster crows, he realizes his cowardice and weeps. In a fascinating manner, a man in the background of the composition faces outward, seemingly asking the viewer to bear witness.

The painting appeared at an auction in Nancy on March 19, 2000, under the title "17th century Lorraine School." It was mentioned for the first time on March 4, 1656, when the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture sent a delegation to its patron, Cardinal Mazarin, in hopes of obtaining housing in the Louvre galleries. Aware that it was dealing with a seasoned collector, the Academy offered him two paintings: a "painting of fruit by Mr. Lemoyne and the Saint Peter by the late Mr. Le Nain." This detail is important because two of the three Le Nain brothers, Antoine and Louis, died suddenly in May 1648: if one chooses to rely on this letter, the "Saint Peter by the late Mr. Le Nain" had to have been painted by either Antoine or Louis. The third and youngest brother, Mathieu, who died in 1677, could not have been the artist. However, the issue may be far more complex.

The AXA Group's contribution to safeguarding French cultural heritage comes to 40,5 million euros over the last seven years. In this way, AXA has enhanced public collections with various masterpieces, including two sketches by Rosso Fiorentino and Houdon's Vestale (Louvre Museum), as well as the magnificent Dogon statue (Quai Branly Museum), Ingres' portrait of the Duke of Orleans (Louvre Museum), Nicolas Poussin's Flight into Egypt (Lyon Museum of Fine Arts) and the earthenware from the Château de Polisy (National Museum of the Renaissance).

This acquisition has been made possible by the tax provisions of the French law of August 1, 2003, on philanthropy, associations and foundations. These provisions, which supplement those of the law of January 4, 2002, on the museums of France, create favorable conditions for the incorporation into public collections, through corporate philanthropy, of works recognized as national treasures by France's consultative commission on national treasures. Frédéric Mitterrand thanks AXA for its exemplary philanthropic work to promote national heritage and the appreciation of art.

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