Arts

World's largest canvas painting fetches $62M at Dubai charity auction

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Written by **Oscar Holland, CNN**

The world's largest canvas painting has sold at a Dubai auction for almost 228 million dirham ($62 million), putting it among the <u>most expensive artworks</u> ever to go under the hammer.

Measuring over 17,000 square feet, "The Journey of Humanity" is roughly equivalent in size to four NBA-regulation basketball courts.

The work was created by British painter Sacha Jafri in order to raise money for children affected by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Having cut the work into 70 parts, Jafri had initially intended to sell the panels separately in the hope of making a combined $30 million. But at a charity auction on Monday, Dubai-based businessman Andre Abdoune offered more than double that to buy them all.

Jafri pictured with a section of "The Journey of Humanity" at the Atlantis The Palm hotel in Dubai. Credit: CNN

The sale puts Jafri's name among the world's most expensive living artists. The $62 million raised by "The Journey of Humanity" has only been beaten at auction by the works of Jeff Koons, David Hockney and the digital artist Beeple, whose NFT image "Everydays: The First 5000 Days" sold via Christie's for over $69 million earlier this month.
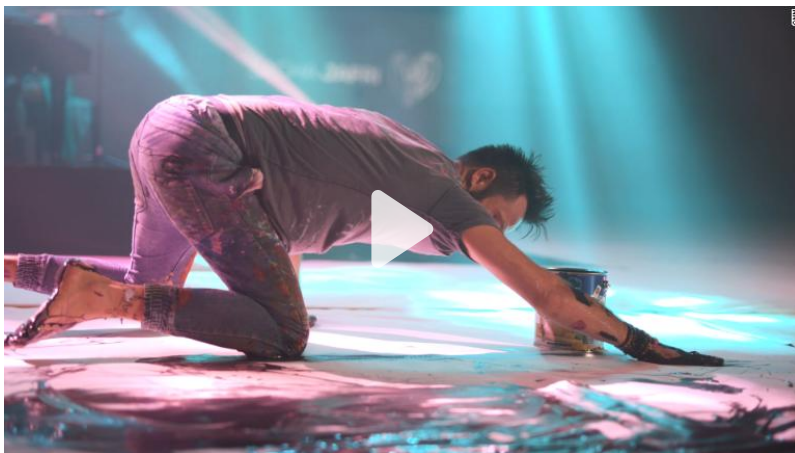
As part of Jafri's Humanity Inspired initiative, proceeds from the auction will be donated to UNICEF, UNESCO, The Global Gift Foundation and Dubai Cares for programs related to children's education, health care, sanitation and digital connectivity. In a press release issued by Dubai Cares, Jafri described the sale as "a moment for humanity."

"At the beginning of my 'Humanity Inspired' initiative, I had a vision to reconnect our broken planet through the hearts, minds and souls of the children of the world," he is quoted as saying. "I feel in my heart that we have come one step closer to achieving this tonight, thanks to Andre."

Record-breaking feat

The artwork holds the Guinness World Record for the world's largest art canvas. It was created in a ballroom at the Atlantis The Palm hotel in Dubai, where Jafri was based when the United Arab Emirates introduced lockdown measures to control the spread of Covid-19 last year.

"I was stuck in Dubai and I wanted to create something poignant, something that would mean something," he told CNN last year, prior to completing the artwork. "Something that could potentially make a really big difference."

Related video: Sacha Jafri speaks to CNN upon the painting's completion last year.

Taking seven months to complete, the painting features abstract brushwork and drip-painting in a style Jafri dubs "magical realism." The canvas was divided into four connected segments, with the first representing "the soul of the Earth," and the others alluding to nature, humanity and the wider universe, Jafri said.

The painter, who was educated at the elite British boarding school Eton alongside Prince William, had also called for children around the world to contribute their own artworks centered on the themes of connection, separation and isolation during the pandemic. The submissions were printed out on paper and incorporated into the huge canvas.

"I asked the children of the world to send in their artworks -- how they feel now, their emotions," he explained last year. "We, as adults, are finding this hard. We found the last five months very difficult, very

confusing, very frustrating and quite scary. But imagine how a 4-year-old child feels."

Sacha Jafri has dubbed his painting style "magical realism." Credit: CNN

Abdoune, the artwork's new owner, said in a press statement that the "investment and love" Jafri put into the painting was "so amazing."

"All my life I was aiming to help children," he said. "When I was a child, I had nothing to eat. Now I have something to eat. We all have to do something."

Parts of the artwork will be on display at Jafri's career retrospective, which is currently showing at the Leila Heller Gallery in Dubai.

Top image: Sacha Jafri at the opening of his show at the Leila Heller Gallery in Dubai in February 2021.