

## The 7 most Expensive Paintings Ever Sold

Published by "In Good Taste" 2020

### 1. Leonardo da Vinci, "Salvator Mundi", circa 1490–1500

Sold for: \$450.3 million at Christie's (November 15, 2017)

Salvator Mundi is a painting by Italian Renaissance artist Leonardo da Vinci dated to c. 1500. Long thought to be a copy of a lost original veiled with overpainting, it was re-discovered, restored, and included in a major Leonardo exhibition at the National Gallery, London, in 2011–12.



The world's most expensive painting to sell at auction is Leonardo da Vinci's *Salvator Mundi*, which sold for \$450.3 million on November 15, 2017 at Christie's. Shattering previous records and exceeding auction expectations, the sale underscored market demand for the artist's rare auction appearances, and the competition among collectors to own a work of such caliber and distinction.

Prior to its sale at Christie's, the painting attracted a myriad of owners and price tags over the years: from selling for £45 at Sotheby's in 1958 to a \$127.5 million purchase price for Russian billionaire Dmitry E. Rybolovlev in 2005, whose trust sold it at the 2017 auction. After its 2005 sale, years of work and research ensued to uncover its true identity. Due to being out of the public eye since 1958, it was somewhat of a salvage project—with an unknown history and hidden by numerous overpaints, it was long mistaken for a copy. Years of research pieced together its story, finally enabling its attribution to Leonardo da Vinci.

Despite its historical significance, this landmark sale brought forth conflicting opinions. Many thought of the sale as one of notoriety and brand recognition, rather than of appreciation and respect of the painting's gravitas. The piece also underwent numerous conservation and cleaning efforts, which sparked conversation around how to classify the painting—how original is it?

## **2. Pablo Picasso, *Les Femmes d'Alger* ("Version O"), 1955**

Sold for: \$179.4 million at Christie's (May 11, 2015)



At Christie's 2015 "Looking Forward to the Past" sale showcasing 20th-century art, Pablo Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger* ("Version O") was estimated to take home \$140 million by pre-auction speculations. After the bidding surpassed \$120 million on the night of the sale, five bidders slowly drove the price forward, often by just \$1 million at a time. Eventually, the painting was awarded to a phone bidder with Brett Gorvy, Christie's international head of contemporary art, for \$179.4 million. At the time, it was the highest price on record for an auctioned painting.

This piece is one of Picasso's boldest and most notable from a series of paintings he produced between 1954 and 1955. It was in good condition at the time of sale, so it was a special find for anyone able to pay the price. Before the 2015 sale, it had last sold in November 1997 for \$31.9 million to a collector from Saudi Arabia.

### **3. Amedeo Modigliani, *Nu couché*, 1917–18**

Sold for: \$170.4 million at Christie's (November 9, 2015)



*Amedeo Modigliani, "Nu couché," 1917–18*

In its debut appearance at auction in 2015, Amedeo Modigliani's *Nu couché* ("reclining nude") achieved the second-highest auction price for a painting at the time: \$170.4 million. Bidding began at \$75 million, which already surpassed Modigliani's previous auction record of \$70.7 million. The work ultimately sold to private Chinese collector Liu Yiqian. As one of Modigliani's most notable paintings, it was produced in 1917 as part of a series of works credited today with the revitalization of the nude form in Modernist art.

### **4. Amedeo Modigliani, *Nu couché (sur le côté gauche)*, 1917–18**

Sold for: \$157.2 million at Sotheby's (May 14, 2018)

Produced around the same time as the previous auction record, *Nu couché (sur le côté gauche)* took the highest auction price in Sotheby's history in 2018 with \$157.2 million. Bidding for the piece started at \$125 million and ultimately landed with the phone bidder with Simon Shaw, Sotheby's co-head of Impressionist and Modern art. This and other nudes by Modigliani were strikingly bold and even considered scandalous when they were originally painted.



Amedeo Modigliani, "Nu couché, sur le côté gauche" 1917–18

## 5. Francis Bacon, *Three Studies of Lucian Freud*, 1969

Sold for: \$142.4 million at Christie's (November 12, 2013)

A rare find during a post-war and contemporary auction held by Christie's in 2013, Francis Bacon's *Three Studies of Lucian Freud* achieved a purchase price of \$142.4 million. The triptych was the subject of "fierce" bidding. Not only did it outperform Edvard Munch's *The Scream*, which had sold for nearly \$120 million at Sotheby's the previous year, but it was also part of a landmark year for Christie's. The auction grossed \$691.6 million, which at the time was nearly \$200 million more than its best-ever season.



## 6. Qi Baishi, Twelve Landscape Screens, 1925

Sold for: \$140.8 million at Beijing Poly Auction (December 17, 2017)

The lofty price tag of Qi Baishi's *Twelve Landscape Screens* wasn't the only notable aspect of its sale in 2017. The selling price solidified Qi's place in the art world as the first Chinese artist to have a work of art sell at auction for over \$100 million. Qi executed the work in 1925 at the age of 62. In his notable style of using calligraphy and brush painting, it's known as one of the most expressive pieces from his body of work. With its twelve landscape screens, it is also the largest piece he ever created.



Qi Baishi (1863 - 16 September 1957) - Nikos Kazantzakis (1883 - 26 October 1957).

The 20 years :

N. Kazantzakis was invited in June 1957 by the Chinese government to visit the country. This was his 2nd trip to China. Upon his return N. Kazantzakis was hospitalized, as he was ill with Leukaemia in Copenhagen and Freiburg im Breisgau, Germany. He died on October 26, 1957. During this trip, Mrs. Eleni Kazantzaki brought with her some authentic woodworks of Qi Baishi.

Qi Baishi was named Honorary Professor and Honorary President of the Beijing Academy of Fine Arts. In 1956, at the age of 93, he was awarded the International Peace Prize by the World Peace Council. The same Prize was awarded in 1956 also to Nikos Kazantzakis, at the age of 73.

Qi Baishi died at the age of 94 in Beijing, a month before the death of N. Kazantzakis who died at the age of 74.

## 7. Edvard Munch, *The Scream*, 1893

Sold for: \$119.9 million at Sotheby's (May 2, 2012)



*Edvard Munch, “The Scream,” 1893.*

An important source of inspiration for Expressionism in the early 20th century, Edvard Munch's *The Scream* has become one of the most iconic and recognizable images of our time (it even has its own emoji) and was the highest-selling painting at auction in 2012. Munch painted the piece in a collection of 22 works that were exhibited in Berlin in 1902, all representing unconventional topics for the time period. They ranged from love and loss to death and spirituality. This is one of four versions of *The Scream*, which Munch had initially titled *Der Schrei der Natur* (“The Scream of Nature”).