



This file photo taken on September 23, 2019, shows a painting entitled "the Mocking of Christ" by the late 13th century Florentine artist Cenni di Pepo also known as Cimabue. — AFP

## Renaissance masterpiece found in French kitchen goes on sale

An early Renaissance painting by the Italian master Cimabue goes under the hammer Sunday, a few weeks after the rare artwork was found hanging in an unsuspecting elderly Frenchwoman's kitchen. "Christ Mocked," by the 13th-century artist also known as Cenni di Pepo, has been valued at four to six million euros (\$4.4 to \$6.7 million) for what could be France's biggest art sale of the year.

Art experts at Turquin in Paris used infrared reflectology to confirm that the tiny unsigned work, just 26 by 20 centimeters, is part of a larger diptych from 1280, when Cimabue painted eight scenes of the passion and crucifixion of Christ. Only two other elements of the diptych are known to exist: "The Flagellation of Christ" at the Frick in New York, and "The Virgin and Child

with Two Angels" at the National Gallery in London.

The "Virgin" was valued at 6.5 million pounds (\$8.3 million) when it was given to the museum in 2000 in lieu of inheritance taxes by a British aristocrat who found it while cleaning out his ancestral seat in Suffolk. The French painting's elderly owner in Compiègne, northeast of Paris, thought it was just an old religious icon when she sought an appraisal from auctioneers at Acteon, the house organizing the sale in nearby Senlis.

"The style, the ornamentation of the gold background, the matchings of the backs of the panels and the overall conditions of the three confirms that they were part of the left side of the same diptych," Acteon said. It was found to be in excellent shape, though covered in grime from

having been displayed right above a cooking hotplate. Historians say only about a dozen works on wood — all unsigned — are thought to have been made by Cimabue, more known for his mosaics, frescoes and altarpieces.

His more natural and nuanced depictions marked a turning point for Italian painters still influenced by highly stylized Byzantine art. Art historians consider him a trailblazer for the creative Renaissance that would flourish under greats like Giotto, one of Cimabue's pupils. Since Friday, the painting has been on public display at the city hall in Senlis. — AFP

## UK museum names blind beetle after Greta Thunberg

Britain's Natural History Museum on Friday named a tiny, blind and wingless beetle after climate activist Greta Thunberg. The honey-colored insect, measuring less than one millimeter, was discovered in the Kenyan capital Nairobi in the 1960s. But it apparently remained nameless until the venerable London museum's scientific associate Michael Darby stepped in.



*Nelloptodes gretae*

"I am immensely impressed with the work of this young campaigner and wanted to acknowledge her outstanding contribution in raising awareness of environmental issues," Darby said. Sweden's Thunberg, still only 16, has injected a burst of energy into the climate change movement since launching her first school strikes one year ago. She has also become a global pop culture icon. Earlier this month, British superstar DJ Fatboy Slim paid tribute to Thunberg by using samples from her incandescent speech at the United Nations in a remix of his smash hit "Right Here, Right Now".

But she has never before been linked to an insect. Max Barclay, a senior curator at the 146-year-old museum, said "the name of this beetle is particularly poignant". "It is likely that undiscovered species are being lost all the time, before scientists have even named them, because of biodiversity loss," said Barclay. "So it is appropriate to name one of the newest discoveries after someone who has worked so hard to champion the natural world and protect vulnerable species." The museum said the beetle's existence in its vast collection had only just been discovered. Its formal scientific name is *Nelloptodes gretae*. It belongs to the "Ptiliidae family of beetles which includes some of the smallest insects in the world," the museum said in a statement. — AFP



In this file photo taken on May 16, 2018, Amsterdam art dealer and historian Jan Six (R) stands beside 'Portrait of a Young Gentleman' by Rembrandt van Rijn in The Hermitage Museum. — AFP photos

## Out of obscurity: Art masterpieces rediscovered

A 13th-century painting by the Italian master Cimabue that goes on auction today, after being discovered in an ordinary home in France, is among a handful of surprising discoveries that have thrilled the art world. The Renaissance painter's "Christ Mocked" had been hanging in the elderly woman's kitchen. She had it valued thinking it was just an old religious icon. Here are three similar astonishing finds.

### Caravaggio in the attic

A painting thought to be a lost masterpiece by the Renaissance artist Caravaggio was found under an old mattress in the attic of a house in the French city of Toulouse in 2014. "Judith and Holofernes", dated to 1606, depicts a biblical scene of the beautiful Jewish widow Judith beheading a sleeping Assyrian general. The house owners discovered it while investigating a leak in the ceiling. After examining the piece for months, Eric Turquin, an art expert in Paris, authenticated the work as a Caravaggio. Most specialists agreed, though some in Italy had their doubts. Estimated at 100 to 150 million euros (\$110 to \$170 million), it was due to be auctioned in France in June 2019. But two days before the sale it was snapped up by an anonymous foreign buyer.

### Rembrandt bargain

In 2016, a Dutch art dealer bought a portrait at a Christie's auction in London that he was convinced was an authentic Rembrandt, even though it was listed in the cata-

logue as coming only from the master's "circle." Rembrandt expert Jan Six had travelled to London days before the auction to discreetly examine the "Portrait of a Young Gentleman". Undated and unsigned, it shows a young man wearing a black cloak with a white lace ruff in a style distinctive of Rembrandt, who died in 1669. Six bought the piece for 137,000 pounds (\$175,000, or 160,000 euros), far below what a real Rembrandt would fetch. On his return to Amsterdam, Six had the painting examined by other art historians, many of whom also believe it is a real Rembrandt.

### Gauguin left on a train

In 2014, Italian police recovered from a pensioner a painting by French post-impressionist artist Paul Gauguin and another by his contemporary Pierre Bonnard, which were stolen from a house in London in 1970. Gauguin's "Fruits on a Table" (1889) and Bonnard's undated "Woman with Two Chairs" had been hanging in the retired Fiat factory worker's kitchen since he bought them at auction in 1975 for 45,000 lire, which would be the equivalent of around 238 euros today.

The unsigned paintings had been auctioned — on the second try, because the first failed to attract any bidders — after being turned in at the Turin railway station as lost objects left on a train. One of the buyer's sons recognized the styles of Gauguin and Bonnard after consulting catalogues. He went to the police and investigations verified they were the stolen pieces. The Gauguin was estimated to

be worth 10 to 30 million euros and the Bonnard 600,000 euros. They were returned to the Italian buyer, since they had been bought in good faith and the original owners had passed away, leaving no heirs. — AFP



In this file photo taken on June 15, 2019, a painting believed by some experts to be Caravaggio's "Judith Beheading Holofernes" is pictured at the Marc Labarre auction house, in Toulouse.

## Nepal arrests rapper VTEN for 'vulgar language'

Police in Nepal have arrested an up-and-coming rapper for using "vulgar language" in a song, authorities said Friday, in the latest incident to spark fears over free speech in the Himalayan nation. Several journalists, artists and regular citizens have been arrested for online postings or for expressing their political beliefs since the ruling communist party won power in 2017.

Samir Ghising, known as VTEN, "has been arrested for using vulgar languages in his song, which is unacceptable for our society," Sahakul Thapa, a senior police officer, told AFP. His song "Hami yestai ta ho ni bro" ("We are just like this bro"), has been viewed more than 19 million times on YouTube since it was uploaded in June but was taken down after his arrest on Thursday. The lyrics contain several swear words, use a slang term for the police and speak about smoking marijuana, which is illegal in Nepal.

Thapa said Ghising had also posted a picture on Facebook in which he wore a police uniform without authorization. The 22-year-old rapper could face up to a year in jail or a fine of 10,000 rupees (\$90) or both. Popular rapper Manas Ghale said it was not justifiable and discouraged artists from pursuing their talent. "It is not the police's job to judge morality. The music

industry needs to unite against this, who knows who they might target next time," Ghale said. Earlier this week, another singer was arrested for a song, and released after he deleted it. In June, a comedian was detained after a director filed a case against his film review. — AFP



Nepalese rapper VTEN

## Belgium's future queen turns 18

Belgium's likely future queen Elisabeth was feted for her 18th birthday on Friday in a symbolic moment for the royal house of the linguistically-divided EU nation. "Eighteen years is the transition to adulthood... The country can count on my commitment," Elisabeth said, dressed in an ivory dress beside a visibly moved Queen Mathilde and the reigning King Philippe.

"Happy birthday, my dear Elisabeth. Spread your wings, be happy. This is what I wish you wholeheartedly," the king told the eldest of his four children in a ceremony broadcast live on national TV. Elisabeth's prospects of ascending to the throne are still relatively far off, given that her father is 59 and has reigned since 2013. But the ceremony organized at the elegant Royal Palace in Brussels looked like an early coronation, with the entire government and key political leaders attending.

Now of age and first in the order of succession, Elisabeth is on the path to become the first queen of Belgium, a country that has known only kings since its creation in 1830. Originally, the Belgian constitution stipulated that accession to the throne was reserved for the descendants of Leopold I by order of primogeniture "to the perpetual exclusion of women". But the Salic law was abolished in 1991, as Belgium finally caught up with other modern monarchies with famous queens such as Victoria and Elizabeth II in Britain and the Netherlands with Beatrix and Juliana.

The King of the Belgians holds an essentially symbolic role, and the monarchy is often criti-

cized by pro-independence Dutch-speakers in Flanders. "An advertising show for the monarchy," headlined left-of-centre daily De Morgen. But, like her father, Elisabeth is appreciated in the Dutch-speaking north, said Vincent Dujardin, professor at the Catholic University of Louvain. "She has done all her schooling in Dutch," he said, which is unprecedented for a

member of the Belgian royal family, formerly seen to favor French. At the palace bash, Elisabeth was joined by 80 young people from all over Belgium who also celebrated their 18th birthday in 2019. — AFP



King Philippe - Filip of Belgium (L) and King Albert II of Belgium attend the celebration for the 18th birthday of Crown Princess Elisabeth (C), on October 25, 2019 at the Royal Palace in Brussels. — AFP