

# Lifestyle

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Italian fashion designer Donatella Versace, right, and US singer Jennifer Lopez pose following the presentation of Versace's Women's Spring Summer 2020 collection in Milan. — AFP

## Early Van Gogh works auctioned in Belgium



A picture shows a painting by Dutch artist Vincent Van Gogh at Kiggen's auction house in Gent, Belgium. — AFP

Two early works by Dutch painter Vincent Van Gogh were auctioned in the Belgian city of Ghent on Sunday, fetching near estimate prices that the organizer said were bargains. The first work, a watercolor of flowers, was snapped up for 220,000 euros, slightly more than expected, auctioneer Johan Kiggen told AFP. The second piece, a charcoal drawing of a jug, went for 140,000 euros, just below the estimated price. "Everyone is happy," Kiggen said, who added that buyers could only bid in person.

"The two works went for a very good price for the buyers," he said. The two buyers, who wished to remain anonymous, were both Belgians and pledged to keep the works in the country, which was a request of the seller. Kiggen said the works have been certified as authentic on several occasions, and are featured in Van Gogh catalogues. Dated to 1883, the works bear little resemblance to Van Gogh's iconic works. They were made before the troubled master was inspired by the Impressionists and Post-Impressionists in Paris.

Van Gogh is one of the most expensive Impressionist and modern artists, with 12 of his works having gone for more than \$30 million at auction. His output of about 2,000 pieces, of which 900 are paintings, are mainly held in museum collections, which means they are a rarity on the art market. — AFP

## Keeping the thread alive at a **Vietnam silk village**

Cocoons bob in boiling water as silk is rapidly teased out, spinning on reels skillfully operated by women in Vietnam's Co Chat village, where households have been making thread for more than a century. The village in Nam Dinh province, two hours south of the capital Hanoi, is nearing the end of silk production season. Dozens of workers, mostly women, in the bustling workshops stir the vats, gently unwinding the fiber from the cocoons through clouds of rising steam. Once the yellow and white fibers are spun onto wooden reels, workers hang them in the sun to dry.

"Production from the silkworm cocoons depends 90 percent on the weather," says workshop owner Pham Van Ba, whose family has been spinning thread for three generations. "Our products will be ruined" if it's not dried under the sun, he tells AFP, explaining that even good quality thread can be marred by inclement weather. Around 30 kilograms of cocoons are processed by each worker every day, and the final threads are sold to traders exporting to Laos and Thailand.

While a few households have invested in modern silk-reeling machines, the majority choose to unwind the cocoons using chopsticks, even if it means sweating through the summer heat in stuffy workshops. Doing it manually makes it easier to salvage usable silk thread from cocoons even if they are not good, Ba says. Each laborer earns around \$10 a day, but worker Tran Thi Hien describes the work as "precarious".

"If the market price goes up, then we make some profit. Otherwise, it's only enough to cover our expenses," the 37-year-old says, sitting next to baskets of yellow cocoons, waiting to be sorted. Like others in the village, she worries about the future of the industry with many youngsters lured by a city lifestyle in nearby Nam Dinh. "My kids tell me this job is too hard," she says. "They will find other jobs instead." — AFP



A worker separates yellow silkworm cocoons.



This photograph shows silk threads hung out to dry in the compound of a home in Co Chat village in Vietnam's Nam Dinh province. — AFP photos



A worker dries collected silk thread yarns in an open courtyard.