

**Salvator Mundi:
(Savior of the World)**

“The Most Expensive Painting Ever Sold!”

By

Maria J. Falco, PhD.

“How did that happen?” is the question that’s been haunting the artistic world ever since it was sold at Christie’s Auction House in New York City on November 15, 2017, for \$450.3 million, to the Prince Badr bin Abdullah bin Mohammed Al Farhan of Abu Dhabi, to be displayed at the Louvre Museum of Abu Dhabi.

For centuries the authenticity of this painting as a work by Leonardo Da Vinci in 1500, had been questioned, denied, attributed to several of Da Vinci’s assistants and students (Bernardini Luini, Giovanni Antonio Boltraffo, for example), cleaned, painted over several times with preservative glazes so that it was almost unrecognizable, and lost. Its previous owners were periodically identified as Louis XII of France who conquered Milan where Leonardo resided before he fled to Florence, and who possibly was given the painting by Leonardo in 1500 so he could safely depart; brought to England by the French Princess Henrietta Maria when she married Charles I of England in 1640; was sold in 1649 to pay off the debts of the Royal Family following the Civil War; returned to Charles II after the Restoration in 1660; auctioned off in 1763 when Buckingham House was sold by an illegitimate heir of the previous King to George III; then disappeared again until it was bought by Francis Cook, a British art collector, in 1900; and was sold again at auction by his descendent in 1958 for, believe it or not, L45 (forty-five pounds or approximately \$62.55 in today’s money)! In 2005 it was auctioned off again, this time in New Orleans, for \$10,000.00 to a consortium of art dealers which included Robert Simon who specialized in “Old Masters.”

Think about it: from \$62.55 to \$450.3 million in less than sixty years! So what could possibly have happened in that brief interval to have resulted in such a “world shaking” outcome?

Well, the consortium believed that this “overpainted mess” on a walnut base might just possibly be the long missing Da Vinci original. So they asked Professor Dianne Dwyer Modestini from New York University to restore it, and after several years of careful work, she did indeed authenticate it as the long-lost painting by Leonardo. In 2011 that authentication was confirmed by a consensus of experts at London’s National Gallery where it was displayed from November, 2011 to February, 2012. In May of 2013 it was purchased by the Swiss art dealer, Yves Bouvier, for just over \$75 million in a private sale brokered by Sotheby’s in New York. The painting was then sold to the Russian collector Dmitry Rybolovlev, for \$127.5 million. In 2017 it was exhibited in Hong Kong, London, San Francisco and New York, where it was sold this time by Christie’s Auction House to the Saudi Arabian Prince for the fantastic sum mentioned above. Over 27,000 people saw the painting in New York before its auction, and 4,500 stood in line to review it just the weekend prior to its sale!

Why so much mystery surrounding this painting? Well, in addition to all the efforts to clean and authenticate it, there were a number of other variations of the work, each competing with the original to be considered Leonardo’s own. Also, consensus must still be reached regarding certain details of the work, as being attributable to Da Vinci, such as the accuracy of the raised right hand, the ringlets of Christ’s hair, the clarity of the crystal orb he holds in his left hand, and dozens of other issues under debate. In fact, X-rays and other means of technical analysis are still to be undertaken and probably will not be finally reported upon until much later in 2018, if then!

So, even though the painting was sold at a fantastic price and exhibited to thousands of people, some experts are still refusing to give their consent to its authenticity until every last test can be conducted. How that will happen or when, considering its current ownership and habitat is in Abu Dhabi, remains to be seen.



ADDENDUM

In the Spring of 2014, I wrote an article for the Digest comparing Pope Francis with St. Francis of Assisi. On February 3 of this year, the Clarion Herald newspaper published by the Archdiocese of New Orleans, posted a prayer by Pope Francis using the Prayer of St. Francis as it's model. Let's take a look at those similarities.

First: The Prayer of St. Francis:

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.

Where there is hatred ... let me sow love.

Where there is injury... pardon,

Where there is doubt...faith,

Where there is despair...hope,

Where there is darkness...light,

Where there is sadness...joy.

Oh Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek

To be consoled... as to console,

To be understood...as to understand,

To be loved... as to love.

FOR

It is in giving...that we receive,

It is in pardoning...that we are pardoned,

It is in dying... that we are born to eternal life.

Second: Pope Francis' Prayer for Countering "Fake News:"

Lord, make us instruments of your peace.

Help us to recognize the evil latent in a communication that

does not build communion.

Help us to remove the venom from our judgments.

Help us to speak of others as our brothers and sisters.

**You are faithful and trustworthy; may our words be seeds of
goodness for the world.**

Where there is shouting, let us practice listening;

Where there is confusion let us inspire harmony;

Where there is ambiguity, let us bring clarity;

Where there is exclusion let us offer solidarity;

Where there is sensationalism, let us use sobriety;

Where there is superficiality, let us raise real questions;

Where there is prejudice, let us awaken trust;

Where there is hostility, let us bring respect;

Where there is falsehood, let us bring truth.

Amen.

Does any of this sound familiar to you? Think about it!