

# World record price of ₹3 crore for Sabavala

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**New Delhi:** Indians seem to be enjoying the excitement of live auctions. Records fell like ninepins at Christie's first auction last year, and on Friday, Delhi's first live auction in over a decade saw a work by one of India's leading modernist painters Jehangir Sabavala set a new world auction record. Titled *The Flight into Egypt*, the work was estimated at Rs 80-90 lakh but competitive bidding drove it to Rs 3 crore.

Works by the Parsi artist, who died after a year-long battle with lung cancer in Mumbai in 2011, have been scaling the auction ladder in recent years. In 2010, one of his serene landscapes fetched Rs 1.7 crore at a Saffronart auction. In 2012, *Vespers 1* fetched Rs 2.1 crore. His wife Shirin Sabavala said she was elated at the news. "We knew it would do well but this was beyond expectations." For an artist considered "not Indian enough", this was long over-due recognition.

Sabavala, known for his superb handling of light, put up his first solo exhibition at the Taj Mahal Hotel in Mumbai after coming back from Europe the 1950s. "We hired a room at the Taj and they wouldn't let us bang nails in. We finally found a way by getting carpenters to build frames," says Shirin.

*Flight into Egypt* tackled a theme that was close to Saba-



'The Flight into Egypt' tackled a subject close to Sabavala's heart — exile

vala's heart — exile. Another modernist, S H Raza, went for Rs 8.17 crore at the Saffronart auction at the Oberoi in Delhi which saw a lot of highrollers attending. The sale grossed a total of Rs. 38.3 crore, with eight paintings going for over a crore and as many as 96% of lots finding buyers. Saffronart co-founder and CEO Dinesh Vazirani said this was the first of many auctions planned for Delhi. "Countries like China have an auction a month but in India, the excitement is still relatively new," said Vazirani, whose home-grown auction house has till now specialized in online auctions.

One of the hottest paddles was for a small but exquisite Manjit Bawa paper work which went for triple its estimated price.