

# Lifestyle

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 29, 2019



Gallery assistants pose with an artwork entitled 'Devolved Parliament' by British artist Banksy, during a press view in London on September 27, 2019, ahead of Sotheby's contemporary art sale, as part of the Frieze Art Fair. — AFP

## Banksy's chimpanzee parliament goes under the hammer

A painting by British street artist Banksy depicting parliament populated by chimpanzees went on show yesterday before going under auction. "Devolved Parliament", painted in 2009, is due to go on display until October 3, when it will go under the hammer at Sotheby's auction house. The derivative work is expected to fetch £1.5 million to £2 million (\$1.85 million to \$2.45 million, 1.7 million to 2.25 million euros).

The current auction record for a Banksy artwork is \$1,870,000, achieved by "Keep it Spotless" at Sotheby's New York in 2008. The sale comes after the controversial five-week suspension of Britain's parliament by Prime

Minister Boris Johnson was deemed unlawful by the Supreme Court, with time running out before Britain is due to leave the European Union on October 31.

Parliament was due to return on October 14 but instead reconvened on Wednesday, since when MPs have spent their time angrily arguing over the suspension, and then arguing about whether their language in doing so was too strong. House of Commons Speaker John Bercow said they were the most toxic scenes he had ever seen in his 22 years in the elected lower chamber. "There's never been a better time to bring this painting to auction," Alex Branczik, Sotheby's European head of contemporary art, told AFP.

"Inevitably what we have been seeing in the Houses of Parliament over the last few months and weeks has become a daily soap opera, not just in the UK... but also across the rest of Europe and indeed the world. The painting measures 4.46 meters by 2.67 meters — the largest known canvas by the anonymous street artist. It shows chimpanzees on the green benches of the Commons, from the viewpoint of the main entrance.

"What he's pointing to here is the regression of the oldest parliamentary democracy in the world into tribalistic animalistic behavior, the sort that we've seen broadcasted on our televisions," said Branczik. "The real

genius of Banksy is his ability to reduce this incredibly complex debate into one single simple image, which importantly is very readily shared in this age of social media and a very image-consuming population." Banksy got the painting out again for March 29 this year, when Britain was originally due to leave the European Union. "I made this 10 years ago. Bristol Museum have just put it back on display to mark Brexit day," the mysterious artist said at the time. "Laugh now, but one day no-one will be in charge." — AFP



## Metallica frontman enters rehab

Metallica are postponing their upcoming tour of Australia and New Zealand after lead vocalist James Hetfield re-entered rehab, the American band announced Friday. The heavy metal band was set to perform their first Australian show as part of their WorldWired tour on October 17, but will now fully refund all tickets, band members Lars Ulrich, Kirk Hammett, and Robert Trujillo wrote in a series of tweets.

"As most of you probably know, our brother James has been struggling with addiction on and off for many

years. He has now, unfortunately, had to re-enter a treatment program to work on his recovery again. Once again, we are devastated that we have inconvenienced so many of you, especially our most loyal fans who travel great distances to experience our shows." Metallica formed in 1981 in Los Angeles and went on to become one of the world's most successful heavy metal bands, selling tens of millions of albums. — AFP

## 'Ideal Palace' still delivers on French postman's dream

With twisted stonework, exotic-looking statues and breathtaking flights of the imagination, it would not look out of place in the hot climes of southeast Asia or in a surrealist painting. But this is not India or Cambodia but southeast France and this extraordinary edifice was not dreamt up by an ancient mystic or Salvador Dali but over a century ago by a humble French provincial postman.

The "Ideal Palace" was created by Ferdinand Cheval, known as Facteur Cheval (Postman Cheval), in his home town of Hauterives south of the city of Lyon. Cheval created the monument by hand, picking up stones especially oddly shaped ones on his postal rounds and elsewhere over a period of 33 years from 1879 to 1912. And after finally finishing his life's work, he set about designing and building his own tomb next door.

In recent years, the site has attracted tens of thousands of visitors a year as one of the most extraordinary examples of naive art architecture anywhere in the world, a fact that would no doubt delight its creator, who died aged 88 in 1924.

### 'Saved from ruin'

But its survival is in no small part due to the novelist Andre Malraux, who exactly half a century ago won protection for the Ideal Palace as a historical monument while serving as culture minister. Malraux defied experts at the time, who denounced the edifice as hideous, to bestow the protection on the Ideal Palace on September 23, 1969. "The tenacity of Malraux saved the palace from ruin," said Frederic Legros, the palace's current director.

Walking round the edifice, an extraordinary melange of influences from east and west, Legros pointed out inscriptions in the palace by Cheval to guide visitors. "By creating this rock, I wanted to prove what the will can do," one inscription reads. "It is true that there is a dimension to wanting to overcome your social condition,"

said Legros. "It is this idea that this man, who was very poor, built himself a palace, the perfect palace," he added.

After finishing the Ideal Palace — whose name simply comes from a poem left by a young visitor from Grenoble describing a visit — Cheval embarked on building his own mausoleum. He had originally wanted to be buried in the palace but both the Church and local state authorities made clear this would not be acceptable. Cheval spent the next seven years sculpting his own tomb, another wildly ornate structure, where he is buried. Legros said it was "his masterpiece".

### 'A total mixture'

The Ideal Palace contains representations of a mosque, a Hindu temple and a mediaeval castle. It has sculptures portraying figures like the Gallic King Vercingetorix, Roman Emperor Julius Caesar or Greek inventor Archimedes. "It is true that it is a total mixture without any superiority of one culture over another. Everything is mixed and everything is made equal," said Legros.

Cheval, who was born in 1836, began the building when he tripped over a stone with an unusual form. The first stone retains a prominent position to this day. "He discovers these rather exceptional shapes and marvels at what nature can do and this encourages him to throw himself into the Ideal Palace," said Legros.

Cheval, who proudly described himself as a peasant and the son of a peasant, had of course never seen an elephant or a leopard in real life, still less travelled to see oriental temples. A self-taught visionary, Cheval drew his inspiration from postcards or illustrated magazines. "He has never seen them, but he reproduces them anyway in his palace, sometimes with a certain amount of reality because it's the interpretation of an image," said Legros. The fame of the monument grew even during Cheval's lifetime.

Pablo Picasso visited the palace with fellow artist Dora Maar, with whom he had a years-long relationship, and his friend the poet Paul Eluard. An all-star biopic directed by prominent French filmmaker Nils Tavernier released in 2018 — "L'Incroyable Histoire du facteur Cheval" (called simply the "Ideal Palace" in English) — further increased interest in his life. According to Legros, last year's visitor numbers of 180,000 was already reached on July 31 this year. — AFP