



## Ad Lib Gallery

10 Church Road, Wimbledon Village, SW19 5DL  
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# Nasser Azam



As a senior executive at Merrill Lynch, Nasser Azam used to deal in equities and derivatives. Now oils and bristles are the 45-year-old's stock in trade but, despite becoming one of London's leading contemporary artists, the way he speaks hints at his previous life: "Given current economic instability, art will continue to be an important asset class, but I think the market will strip down to what really counts."

If Azam is right, then his work counts. The storm brewed in the world he once inhabited is now blowing through auction houses, but at a sale in New York at the end of last year, one of Azam's works fetched \$332,500 – way over its estimate and more than a piece by Banksy. Half the lots didn't even sell.

The trend-bucking work was *Homage to Francis Bacon: Triptych I*, which Azam completed just two years after swapping his flip chart for an easel (a successful painter before his 23-year banking career, Azam "never stopped being an artist"). What made it unusual was that it was completed in zero gravity; in July, Azam took to the skies above Moscow in a "parabolic aircraft", also known as a "vomit comet".

Working with oil crayons ("paint would have floated away") as the plane performed a series of nosedives, causing weightlessness, Azam attacked three canvases in 25-second bursts. "The lack of orientation when you're weightless is a real shock to the system," says Azam, who managed to hold on to his crayons as well as the contents of his stomach. "But I managed it and felt a real sense of elation."

For his next piece of performance art, Azam is off to Antarctica to create sculptures. Until then, he's just relieved to be out of banking. "Selling well makes more work possible and at the moment that's important – the timing has worked out extremely well."

Author - Simon Usborne from the Independent  
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