

Vincent Van Gogh shrine to bid for painting

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WHEN one of Vincent Van Gogh's paintings goes under the hammer in New York next month, a Belgian entrepreneur hopes to fulfil a remarkable dream.

Dominique-Charles Janssens, who owns the country inn near Paris where Van Gogh spent his last days, intends to bid for *The Fields*, one of his last paintings, at Sotheby's on November 7 so that he can hang it in the room in which the artist died.

Janssens is raising money on the internet by offering donors a personal access code. It would allow them to view the painting at any time through a webcam in the attic room above a cafe where Van Gogh died two days after shooting himself in a field.

"This has become my challenge, my obsession, my dream," said Janssens last week, complaining that Van Gogh's paintings were mainly in museums or private collections far from where they were painted.

"I want to bring back the painting to hang where it once dried so that Van Gogh can achieve the dream he wrote about. He wrote in a letter to his brother, 'I hope I can have my own exhibition one day in a cafe'."

Janssens declined to say how much money had been raised for the painting of a golden field near the inn at Auvers-sur-Oise, just outside Paris, where Van Gogh is buried. The painting has been listed at £20m but is expected to fetch much more.

Donors who pledge £3,000 at the vangoghsdream.org website will also be given an exact copy of the original key to Van Gogh's room.

Janssens is certainly optimistic. On one wall in the attic he has placed a bulletproof glass case where he hopes to install an authentic Van Gogh one day, even if insufficient funds are raised to bid for *The Fields*.

Visitors pay £7 for a tour of the inn. Holes that are visible in the walls were made by Van Gogh when he was hanging his paintings, Janssens says.

His fascination with the artist dates from 1985, when he had a car crash in front of the inn, called *Auberge Ravoux*. While convalescing, he read a book of Van Gogh's letters and decided it was his destiny to buy and restore the building. "I was 37 at the time," he explained, "the same age as Van Gogh when he died."

He set about trying to recreate the atmosphere that Van Gogh might have known. A cafe was installed downstairs, just as in the painter's day. Visitors climb a narrow staircase to a small attic room with a skylight and a single chair. Janssens said this "shrine" often had a strong impact on Van Gogh fans, some of whom fainted on entering the room. In his final 70 days at Auvers, the artist produced several paintings and drawings of the fields of wheat and potatoes surrounding the town. They were hanging on his wall as he bled to death from a bullet wound and may have been the last thing he saw.