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Massive Martian Rock Fetches \$5.3 Million at New York Auction

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A massive meteorite originating from Mars has been sold for a staggering \$5.3 million at a Sotheby's auction in New York, marking a new milestone for space memorabilia collectors and planetary science enthusiasts alike.

Weighing 25 kilograms (about 55 pounds), the space rock, officially named Northwest Africa 16788 (NWA 16788) is now the largest known piece of Martian material on Earth.

According to Sotheby's, the final bid was \$4.3 million. However, with additional premiums and fees, the total sale price reached \$5.3 million. The identity of the winning bidder has not

been made public. However, the auction house described the piece as a “once-in-a-lifetime” find, attracting worldwide attention from collectors, institutions, and investors.

The specimen was discovered in November 2023 in Niger’s stretch of the Sahara Desert and is believed to have arrived on Earth after being ejected from Mars by a violent asteroid impact. The meteorite traveled roughly 140 million miles before landing on our planet.

Martian meteorites are incredibly rare. Only around 400 such fragments have ever been found on Earth. NWA 16788 alone accounts for nearly 7 percent of all known Martian material that currently exists here. The auction listing noted that the meteorite is roughly 70 percent larger than the next-largest known Martian rock, making it a scientifically and commercially significant acquisition.

Space Discovery

Geologists classify NWA 16788 as a “shergottite,” a volcanic rock that forms on Mars during ancient lava flows. These stones are blasted off the Martian surface when asteroids slam into the planet, sending debris hurtling through space. Occasionally, those fragments land on Earth, surviving the fiery descent through our atmosphere and landing as meteorites.

Sotheby’s described the meteorite’s rich reddish-brown hue and rugged, naturally sculpted surface as “unbelievably rare.” The auction house said its unique fusion crust and untouched outer layer make it both a scientific marvel and a collector’s dream. Given the scarcity of Martian meteorites and the growing global appetite for rare space artifacts, the final price came as little surprise to those watching the auction.

The sale underscores the increasing interest in extraterrestrial objects, not just among scientists and researchers, but also within the high-end collector’s market. As private buyers and institutions vie for these one-of-a-kind items, their value is likely to keep climbing.

Meteorites, defined as fragments of comets, asteroids, or meteoroids that survive passage through Earth’s atmosphere and land on the surface, offer researchers invaluable insights into the origins of our solar system. But for many buyers, the sheer wonder of holding a piece of another planet drives interest.

While the buyer of NWA 16788 has chosen to remain anonymous, the impact of this sale is unmistakable. It’s a powerful reminder that Earth’s connection to the cosmos can be as

tangible as a rock sitting in the palm of your hand, one that took a journey of millions of miles to get here.