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Wednesday May 23 3:11 AM ET

Kerouac Manuscript Auctioned for Record \$2.2 Million

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Reuters Photo

By Ellen Wulforst

NEW YORK (Reuters) - The original manuscript of Jack Kerouac's "On the Road," a groundbreaking novel that became a bible of the Beat Generation, sold at Christie's on Tuesday for \$2.2 million, a record for a literary manuscript at auction.

The purchaser of the 120-foot-long, single-spaced typed scroll was Jim Irsay, owner of the Indianapolis Colts professional football team, who said he considered his purchase "a stewardship" of the historic work.

"I don't believe you own anything in this world. It's dust to dust," he said after the auction at Christie's in Manhattan.

"I wanted to make sure we kept it in the country, in America, and we give people an opportunity to enjoy it," he added. "It's just enjoyable to make sure it doesn't get locked away or taken somewhere far away."

Christie's had estimated the 50-year-old manuscript would sell for \$1 million to \$1.5 million. Bidding opened at \$650,000 and rapidly escalated to set the record for a literary manuscript at auction, Christie's said.

SALE PRICE THAT WAS EXCEEDED

The previous record was set on May 15 by the handwritten manuscript of Louis-Ferdinand Celine's nihilist 1932 novel, "Journey to the End of the Night," sold for \$1.5 million at the Drouot-Montaigne auction house in Paris.

Irsay, a 41-year-old resident of Indianapolis, said he was considering putting his prize on display at a museum in Indiana, making it available to academics and taking it on a cross-country tour in 2007 to mark the 50th anniversary of the book's publication.

Kerouac pasted together 12-foot strips of paper -- he described it at various

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times as either Teletype or tracing paper -- to create a scroll he could feed without interruption into a typewriter.

Using no paragraphs and little punctuation, he typed ``On the Road" in 20 days in April 1951.

Published six years later, the novel, based on his cross-country wanderings with Neal Cassady and their experiments with jazz, sex and drugs, became a definitive work of the Beat Generation -- a group of alienated, youthful writers, poets and artists disillusioned with what they considered the shackles of convention and conformity.

STORY WITHOUT END

The now-yellowing manuscript is filled with editing marks, crossed-out words and marginal notes, and its ending is missing. According to Beat lore, the ending was eaten by a dog, but skeptics say Kerouac disliked the original conclusion and destroyed it.

Irsay, who said he thought Kerouac would be ``flabbergasted" at the \$2.2 million price tag, joked about keeping the work safe.

``We have a very aggressive dog, so we've talked about keeping it away from him," he said.

Noting that he also owns a guitar that once belonged to [Elvis Presley](#), Irsay said, ``If you have some talent, don't throw anything away."

Beat poet Allen Ginsberg once called the ``On the Road" manuscript ``a magnificent single paragraph several blocks long, rolling, like the road itself," and argued that it should have been published as written rather than ``hacked and punctuated and broken."

``The original mad version is greater than the published version, the manuscript still exists and someday when everybody's dead will be published as it is," Ginsberg wrote in a 1958 newspaper review.

Kerouac died in 1969 at the age of 47. The manuscript has been in the hands of family members.

``On the Road" has sold more than 3 million copies and been translated into 25 languages.

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