

Norwegian artist Nerdrum faces jail for tax fraud

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Odd Nerdrum and his "Running Bride" (oil on canvas)

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One of Norway's most famous contemporary artists, Odd Nerdrum, was on Wednesday sentenced to two years behind bars for not paying tax on the millions he has raked in selling his work.

Famous for his apocalyptic paintings, the 67-year-old artist was accused of not paying taxes on the some 14 million kroner (1.8 million euros, \$2.6 million according to Wednesday's conversion) paid to his gallery for his work between 1998 and 2002.

"Nerdrum has been found guilty of aggravated fiscal fraud," the Oslo district court ruled, defining the crime as aggravated because the artist had "put significant work into hiding his assets," especially by placing a large quantity of money in a safety deposit box in Austria.

The court ruled that Nerdrum had evaded paying taxes on around 10 million kroner and that his fiscal fraud had cost the Norwegian state around five million kroner in lost revenues.

Nerdrum, who has since settled his dues with the Norwegian tax authorities, pleaded not guilty.

One of his lawyers swiftly said he would appeal the verdict.

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"I have rarely read such a categorical verdict that allows so little room for doubt. The essential elements were moreover not taken into account and we are really not happy," Tor Erling Staff told the NTB news agency.

"We will appeal," he added.

At the beginning of his trial, Nerdrum had said the whole case was nothing but "bullshit" and that he was "not good with numbers."

A resident of Iceland since 2003, the artist was reportedly planning to move to France before the case began.