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Views and news from Norway 🇳🇴

Artist Odd Nerdrum wins royal pardon

October 9, 2017

Norwegian artist Odd Nerdrum, convicted of tax evasion in several courts and facing a year in prison, has received a royal pardon from King Harald V. No reason for the unusual pardon was given, after the government had relented and forwarded Nerdrum's pardon application to the palace.



Odd Nerdrum long shunned the media but once offered this self-portrait on his website, called "The saviour of the painting." He was known for wearing long frocks on the streets of Oslo, and for his provocative paintings depicting everything from defecation to his own erect penis.

"Odd Nerdrum was pardoned by royal resolution on September 22," confirmed Norway's justice ministry to newspaper *Dagens Næringsliv (DN)* on Monday. The 73-year-old artist, still facing a prison term that had been reduced to 20 months (eight of them suspended) after a variety of appeals, had **applied to the ministry for a pardon last year**. It was initially denied in the spring of 2016 but ended up being forwarded to the monarch after all.

"We are extremely glad over the king's decision," Nerdrum's high-profile defense attorney John Christian Elden told *DN*. "The ministry rejected the application in April 2016 and our complaint was heard by the king in September of this year." Elden added that the royal pardon brings Nerdrum's tax troubles to an end.

"He can continue painting as the free soul he is," Elden wrote in a text message to *DN*.

Asked why Nerdrum had been pardoned, not least because Nerdrum's tax evasion was ruled as being "severe," Elden replied: "We applied. The king

doesn't give any reason." Nerdrum's final sentence included convictions on three counts of aggravated tax evasion.



DN reported Monday on how the pardon process in Norway is secret and bound by confidentiality laws. Convicts can apply for pardons through the police district where the conviction occurred. Such applications are then forwarded by prosecutors with their evaluations to the Justice Ministry, where they are either rejected or approved. If approved, they are forwarded to the monarch who makes a formal decision at a weekly Council of State with the government. The process suggests that the ministry, after initially rejecting Nerdrum's pardon request, changed its mind with political consent from the government, in order for it to have been presented to the king.

Odd Nerdrum made a rare appearance on television, on NRK's talk show Skavlan, shortly after his first tax conviction. He argued that he would become one of the first "art-political prisoners" in Europe. PHOTO: NRK screen grab

Nerdrum's attorneys had always argued that the artist was too sensitive to be confined and that a jail term would all but ruin his health and artistic expression. Their arguments and appeals arose after successive courts found Nerdrum guilty of failing to report sales proceeds and stashing money abroad. The artist, who was forced to appear in court and found that disturbing as well, argued that business and financial matters were not his strength. He sold most of his production through agents and galleries abroad as well.

His tax troubles began back in 2002, after *DN* revealed he'd sold paintings for more more than NOK 100 million. Norwegian tax authorities launched an investigation and ended up filing charges against the artist, who was highly popular at the time. He was convicted by an appeals court in June 2012 and sentenced to two years and 10 months prison for having sold art for nearly NOK 14 million without declaring the income on his Norwegian tax returns.

Nerdrum appealed to the Supreme Court and won a reprieve on the grounds his sentence was poorly based. The high court sent the case back to the appeals court, which in yet another round of legal action found that Nerdrum had paid tax on some of the sales but far from all. His sentence was reduced to one year and eight months in prison and that's what he'll now avoid serving, after the **Supreme Court at that point decided not to hear his appeal of it as well.**

Nerdrum has had to deal with several other legal challenges as well, both from former partners and his art institute. That **case was eventually settled.**

Nerdrum's wife and spokesperson, Turid Spildo, issued a statement Monday morning that the family also was "extremely glad" over "this final decision." The family, she stated, wanted to thank "the king in the Council of State," attorney Elden and his office, and a journalist at newspaper *Dagbladet*, with no further explanation. Spildo then stated that Nerdrum's family "requested peace and quiet in this joyful moment."

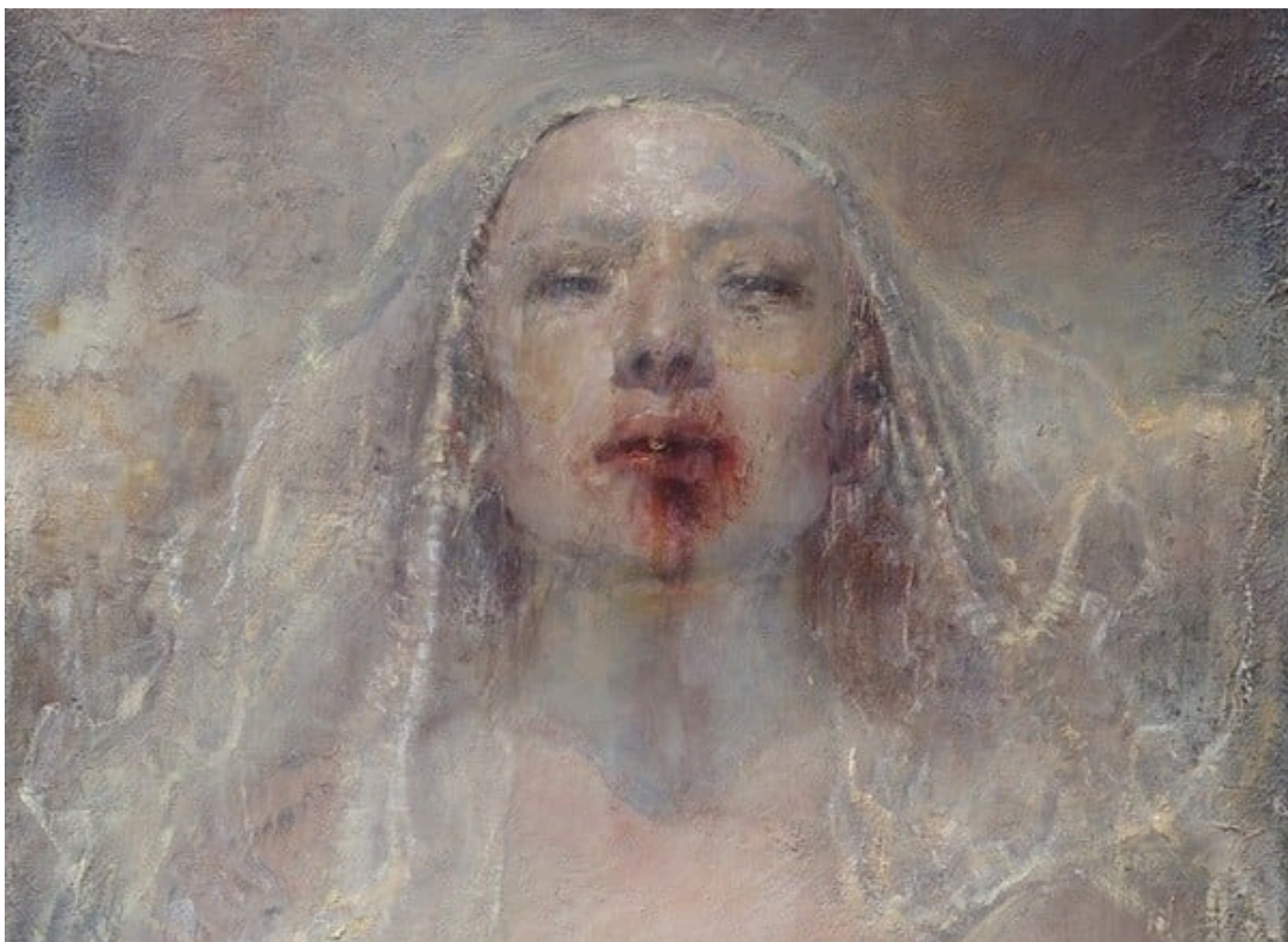


newsinenGLISH.no/**Nina Berglund**

Galleries(<https://news.artnet.com/market/galleries>)

Odd Nerdrum, Awaiting Jail Time for Tax Fraud, Barred From Leaving Norway

Tax woes continue to plague the artist.



Odd Nerdrum, *Running Bride*. Image: Courtesy of Booth Gallery, New York.

Eileen Kinsella (<https://news.artnet.com/about/eileen-kinsella-22>) April 22, 2016

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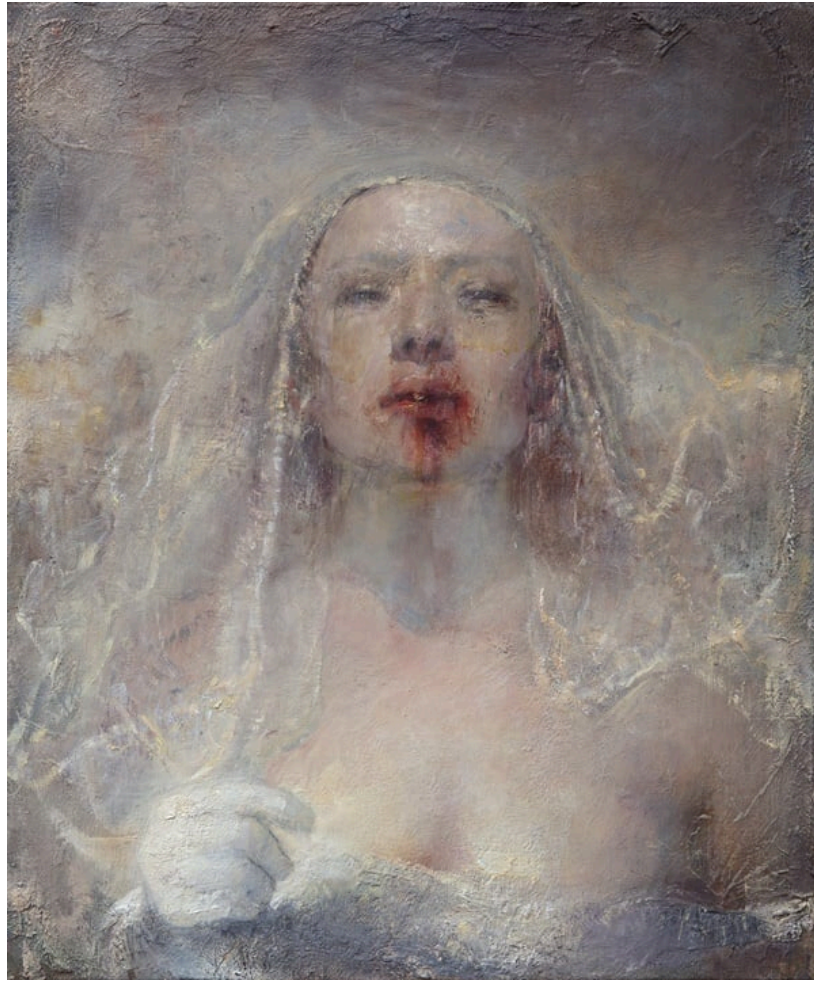
Odd Nerdrum, *The Bridge*. Image: Courtesy of Booth Gallery, New York.

Norwegian painter Odd Nerdrum is having his first solo show in the US in five years but he will be prohibited from attending the opening.

Art dealer Casey Gleghorn, who is director of the [Booth Gallery](http://www.paulboothgallery.com/exhibitions/upcoming/) (<http://www.paulboothgallery.com/exhibitions/upcoming/>) in midtown Manhattan, told artnet News that the Nerdrum show, titled "Crime and Refuge," is set to open April 30. However, he learned within recent days that Nerdrum is unable to travel to the US after unsuccessful appeals in [a long-running tax fraud case](http://www.artnet.com/magazineus/news/artnetnews/odd-nerdrum-tax-evasion.asp) (<http://www.artnet.com/magazineus/news/artnetnews/odd-nerdrum-tax-evasion.asp>) that may finally land the artist in jail.

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Odd Nerdrum, *Running Bride*.

Image: Courtesy of Booth Gallery, New York.

The artist pleaded unsuccessfully to be allowed to serve his sentence at home since he suffers from Tourette syndrome, among other health issues, Gleghorn says.

The case, which dates back at least five years (<http://www.artnet.com/magazineus/news/artnetnews/odd-nerdrum-tax-evasion.asp>), is extraordinarily complicated. Gleghorn told artnet News that the trouble started when some of Nerdrum's paintings began to re-liquify starting around 1989. Nerdrum had attempted to make his own "Maroger" medium, a mixture of cooked oil, lead flakes, and mastic, that allows for paint to be manipulated for a longer time. Apparently the component that failed was the mastic which Nerdrum "had been misguided to [use] by a Norwegian conservator," according to Gleghorn.

Nerdrum attempted to repaint the compositions as replacements for those that had "melted" between 1989 and 2002. But Norwegian officials, Gleghorn says, taxed the artist for both the originals, which the artist wrote off as a loss, and the replacements. In the late 1990s, when the artist joined New York's Forum Gallery, the gallery reportedly negotiated to retain a percentage of his commission as security against the melting paintings.

artnet reached out to Forum Gallery for comment. Associate director Jillian Casey wrote in an email: "We do indeed still work with Odd Nerdrum, but we do not represent him exclusively, and we know nothing specific of his travel plans, legal difficulties or exhibition prospects at any galleries."

Gleghorn maintains in an email that the "main evidence against Nerdrum is that he and his accountant did not report this check, held mutually in trust as income. A notarized agreement between Odd and the gallery was offered as evidence (and ignored)."

On August 17, 2011, district courts in Norway sentenced the artist to two years in jail. The artist appealed the sentence, but in June 2012, the court of appeals increased the time to two years and ten months, after prosecutors claimed that the artist had made great efforts to hide his assets from the Norwegian government.



Odd Nerdrum, *Contra natura* (1988-90), is the most expensive work by the artist at auction. It sold for \$231,000 in 2007. Image: Courtesy of Bruun Rasmussen.

In 2013, the Supreme Court in Oslo ruled that the evidence did not support the verdict, thanks to research from Anders Fjellberg, a journalist from *Dagbladet*, who retrieved Icelandic documents (where Nerdrum had moved) and to Austria, to collect statements as evidence.

Fjellberg reportedly supplied documents including correspondence over an Austrian bank statement, Icelandic tax returns, and income which showed that the court had counted Nerdrum's income several times.

The case then went back to appeals court, where the final decision was one year in prison and eight months of house arrest. artnet News reached out to Fjellberg for comment. He told us in an email: "I have not heard about that specific issue—regarding Nerdrum not being allowed to enter the US. But as far as I know, he is still waiting to serve time for the tax fraud case." He continued, "His sentence was heavily reduced, but he still has to serve a year in prison. [The case] is a bit of a mess and a complicated matter."

According to the artnet Price Database, a total of 119 works by Odd Nerdrum have come up at auction over the years. Of these, 43 works, or 36 percent, have failed to sell.

The highest price ever paid at auction is \$231,000, set at Danish auction house Bruun Rasmussen in 2007, for *Contra Natura* (1988-90). The second highest price is just under \$170,000, set at Sotheby's London in June 2007 for *The Animal Stone* (1987). The lowest price, however, is a mere \$465, paid at Grev Wedels Plass Auksjoner AS in 2010, for a lithograph, *Kjaerlighetspar*.

artnet News also reached out to Nerdrum's attorney, John Christian Elder, but did not receive an immediate response.

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Odd, Odder, Odd Nerdrum

MutualArt invites you on a hauntingly weird exploration of one of the most peculiar artists alive today, who unsettles and provokes, and draws pilgrims to the Norwegian countryside

Michael Pearce / MutualArt

Jan 24, 2020

MutualArt invites you on a hauntingly weird exploration of one of the most peculiar artists alive today, who unsettles and provokes, and draws pilgrims to the Norwegian countryside.



Odd Nerdrum, Three Singers, Oil on Canvas, 82.5" x 102"

It happened that in the midst of the dissipations attendant upon a Los Angeles winter, there appeared at Patrick Painter Gallery a show of paintings by one of the world's most notorious figurative painters, remarkable for the singularity of his works, and of the man himself.

Like a character supernaturally cast from a retro-gothic novel set in the dangerous days of early science, Odd Nerdrum fashions himself in a linen smock and robes, rough leather vestments and draped furs. He resembles the characters in his paintings, described by the uninitiated as archaic, or post-apocalyptic. His sons and wife share the peculiarly hand-made sartorial tastes of the pater familias of the clan, theatrical in dress, the sons more Byronic, and when he makes a public appearance he is trailed by his acolyte fans, who trail behind the master like medieval cos-play devotees. Nerdrum himself has been costumed thus so long that it has become habitual and has not a hint of affectation.



A publicity still of Odd Nerdrum in his black robe.

For years, exiled from his home while the silent agents of the Norwegian government pursued him for failing to provide them with their take of the wealth his art provided, his cavalcade dwelled among the black volcanic extrusions and steaming springs of frozen Iceland, where for half the year the night is full, and he painted strange imagery composed upon geometric patterns, as if to illustrate the rituals and incantations of some esoteric secret society. Even his clouds formed occult shapes and presented themselves as mysteries to be solved. The stories the paintings told were of naked men striding in step through barren Thule landscapes, assailed by snakes as they sang; of men sitting in patterned order in an icy wasteland, with their mouths open and heads cast back, waiting for a drop of rain to fall and assuage their thirst; of wrapped refugees either dead or sleeping, lips pulled back to expose vampiric teeth. Perhaps they were under the eldritch influence of the draugar, the undead of the burial mounds of Viking myth, which driven by avarice and envy for the living, sinisterly invade dreams and haunt homes.



Odd Nerdrum, Dawn, Oil on Canvas, 75 1/4" by 111 3/4"

After Iceland the clan moved to the city of light, where they worked and lived in a crumbling and haunted Parisian château, where sleeping guests were visited in the darkness by a door-handle-rattling poltergeist, which smashed mirrors, flipped chairs and one night poured impossibly materializing water over a visitor chopping wood in the cellar. Mysterious chamber music played in the heart of the ghostly night from an invisible source. A boy dressed in the clothes of a century ago appeared and disappeared in the garden.

[SEE ALL AUCTION RESULTS BY ODD NERDRUM](#)

If postmodern painters are recognizable for their irony and distaste for grand narratives, for rejecting modernism, for their self-referentiality and their moral relativism, and for their irreverence, then Nerdrum is the perfect specimen. He paints in antique style, as if possessed by the ghosts of Rembrandt and Apelles, but hallucinating memories of the aftermath of an apocalyptic war and insists that these are timeless paintings. He paints images that provoke and unsettle even his most devoted admirers: notorious paintings of women defecating; gory horse decapitations; self-portraits with a battered, bleeding face, lurching from his plague bed, suffering from hepatitis, spreading a golden robe to expose an ambitious erection; hermaphrodites; nothing's shocking. He is legendary for his insistence that he is not an artist, but a kitsch-painter, and utterly rejects the conventions and expectations of the conventional art world, although the price he has paid for decades of hostility toward the critics has been a black strain of indulgent self-pity that seeps from his work. But Nerdrum is a true genius, and even his moments of narcissism are a conventional person's wonder.



Odd Nerdrum, After the Flood, oil on canvas, 81.5" x 117"

Now, in a moment of shocked gratitude, two naked refugees stand in a graceful skiff, their hands held to their breasts in an attitude of thankfulness, behind them the wrecked shoreline, a testament to their survival of the tsunami that has scoured the earth. Strange domes on distant hilltops have escaped the deluge. The millenarian turn of the century failed to produce an adequate apocalypse, and Nerdrum's perceived persecution became a reality when he was accused of tax evasion in 2012. With an international investigation and trial underway his melancholy paintings turned almost cheerful, and his postdiluvian refugees began a nearly blissful life, finding an eerie reconciliation with the hostile landscape. They bathed in hot springs, nurtured and protected and embraced babies. Some learned how to project themselves into the astral realm. In 2014 he was found guilty and convicted to a 20-month prison sentence.



Odd Nerdrum, Quick Born, oil on canvas, 68" x 84"

Then King Harold of Norway pardoned revenant Nerdrum, and the clan returned to the rustic farmhouse he owns in the countryside two hours South of Oslo, where he again welcomed the visits of painty pilgrims who hoped to learn the secrets of his art. His two dim, bare-boarded wood-framed barns, have been converted into austere studios cluttered with brushes, paint tubes and thick linen canvases, with comfortless hard wooden chairs. Nerdrum is a kind man, and some beneficiaries of his generous hospitality stayed for months, living like novitiates treading the floorboards of his dark studio in quiet devotion to the master. Lion-hearted Amy Sherald, Fergus Ryan, Boris Koller and Richard Thomas Scott made pilgrimage to the master's table, broke bread, and thus, blessed and anointed, departed to develop their own individual methodologies and subjects, benefitting from the experience of their touch with greatness, free from the cultish devotion to Nerdrum's style that seems to entrance his hard-core scarab-devotee students.

Now, death has returned to the refugee world. The snake has struck lethal poison into the veins of another victim, and an open-mouthed and weeping father wearing a carapace headcloth clutches the dead boy, his distraught bow cast alongside a pair of thin and struggling weeds. The viper is held in the lifeless hand of his grey son. In the distance, tall, solitary figures are isolated against the horizon, waiting, like angels of death. A becalmed boat drifts in the still water beside the rocky shoreline.

CHECK NERDRUM'S AUCTION PERFORMANCE



Odd Nerdrum, Man with Rock, oil on canvas, 53.5" x 52.5"

Two hermaphrodites embrace beside a newborn in a classic Nerdrum moment. The twisted infant is cast aside, bloodied, unattended and unwanted. He has painted many hermaphrodites. They are an ancient symbol of the completion of the great work, finding the balance of spagyric alchemy. This multiplied, impossible child brings chaos to order.

Nerdrum remembered both his self-sympathy and his favorite subject when he cast himself as an exhausted Sisyphean *Man With Rock*, and a tall, solitary figure appeared behind him. Nerdrum has always played the prophet in the wilderness. Now transfiguration awaits.

Odd Nerdrum: After the Flood

Patrick Painter Gallery

1820 Industrial Street, Los Angeles

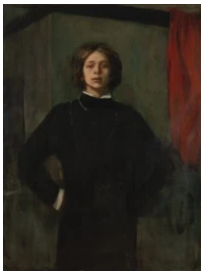
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Odd Nerdrum stages a comeback

March 25, 2022

Norwegian artist Odd Nerdrum has mounted an attention-grabbing comeback, more than two decades after his last exhibition in Norway. True to form, though, and disappointing fans, he did not show up when the largest display of his work to date was unveiled in Oslo.



Self portraits are a big part of Odd Nerdrum's art. This one is called "Wanderer". PHOTO: Fineart

The exhibition at the gallery Fineart Oslo, ambiguously titled *You see we are blind*, presents more than 50 previously unseen works by Nerdrum. More than 1,000 people attended the opening, many hoping in vain to get a glimpse of the much talked-about artist who rarely appears in public.

You see we are blind extends dystopian themes that Nerdrum, now age 77, has explored in recent decades: suffering and decay embodied in unglamorous naked humans, fighting for survival in gloomy, barren landscapes. Most of the exhibition is found in the dimly lit basement of the gallery, adding to the creepy ambience of twilight and apocalypse communicated by the paintings.

No price list was made available for the exhibition but Fineart manager Rolf Stavnem told NewsInEnglish.no that "we're happy with sales this far, and have some exciting processes going."





Most of the exhibition is on display in the gallery's dimly-lit basement, adding a twilight feel. PHOTO: NewsInEnglish.no/Morten Møst

The pictures were created over the last 20 years, a period when Nerdrum has mostly avoided the public eye. He has not wanted to exhibit his art since a 1998 retrospective exhibit at Oslo's Astrup Fearnley Museum that an estimated 70,000 people came to see. He prefers instead to paint and to guide students at his private art school in Norway, and cultivate an outsider's image.

Most media coverage of Nerdrum will mention his bitterness and belief that he's misunderstood and rejected, despite being respected as one of Norway's greatest contemporary artists. He also earns well on his art. Nerdrum, however, spent years in court after failing to pay necessary taxes on his art sales and faced time in jail until **receiving a pardon from King Harald V in 2017**. He is also known to be unhappy that some of Norway's major art institutions don't own his works, and that those that do, don't display them often enough.

Nerdrum declared long ago that he would never talk to Norwegian media again, although media folks would gladly talk to him. He has sometimes broken that promise, though, most recently in a 12-page cover story in *D2*, a high-end weekly magazine published by business newspaper *Dagens Naeringsliv*.

In that rare interview, Nerdrum described his goal: "To create a significant work of art that's allowed to hang somewhere."

Nerdrum is often represented by his youngest son Öde, age 26, who has taken on a role as a spokesperson of sorts for his father. It was Öde who spoke on behalf of his father at the exhibition opening.



Öde Nerdrum, the artist's 26-year-old son, often represents his father on public occasions. He's seen here with a painting titled "Ett og et"

*halvt år" (One and a half years). PHOTO: NewsInEnglish.no/Morten**Møst*

"I believe Odd Nerdrum has been very nervous," Öde Nerdrum told *NewsinEnglish.no* afterwards. "When it comes to attending his own vernissage and presenting his work, he is simply a bit of a wimp."

The younger Nerdrum went on to say that "meeting other people can be a scary thing" for his father, "and even moreso when it's about presenting his work." Öde said his father "spends so much time on each picture to make sure it's good enough, and attaches a lot of emotion to it. Describing his feelings using words is hard for Odd Nerdrum. He does that with his paintbrush. Having said that, I think he's very relieved now to finally present a number of pictures."

Öde Nerdrum admitted to being nervous himself. "When my father presents things, it's almost like an extension of myself, so I get nervous too. But that goes away now that I'm here and get to see pictures like this shine," he said, gesturing to a painting of a little boy called *Ett og et halvt år* (One and a half years).

"It's a fantastic exhibition. And it's equally fantastic so many people come to see works of art that have something *to* them," the younger Nerdrum said, not just because people are talking *about* them.

The story continues below the image.

"Five singing women" was called a masterpiece by one art critic. PHOTO: Fineart

Mona Pahle Bjerke, a critic for state broadcaster NRK, reported that she found "treasures and trash" at the exhibition, however. She said *You see we are blind* shows how good Odd Nerdrum is at his best, but also that he allows himself to produce sloppy work. Bjerke found paintings that seemed unfinished: perfect faces and bodies left in an unexciting "brown soup."

She did find at least one masterpiece, though: *Five singing women*, showing five naked women and a child lying on the ground singing, viewed from above. "Both in composition and colour-wise it's so masterfully executed that we don't even ask why these people are lying on the ground singing."

She also said it's "understandable" that Odd Nerdrum has felt overlooked by Norway's state art institutions. "Just the fact that the National Museum has failed to secure the key works from Nerdrum's golden era is and will remain a scandal," Pahle Bjerke said in her review.



Art critic Lars Elton complained of “a lot of strange anatomy” and “sloppily painted details.” In Elton’s opinion, “what we see in several of Nerdrum’s paintings this time is so different from ideals he used to uphold, that it’s fair to ask whether he gives a damn about his idols,” known to be Rembrandt and Caravaggio, two classic 16th century masters. Elton, writing in newspaper *Dagsavisen*, said the exhibition reflects hard work over a long period of time, but also noted that the time frame is 22 years. *Five singing women* is dated 2001. Elton reckoned Nerdrum did better work with similar compositions long ago, for example *Dawn* (1990) which was purchased by rock star David Bowie.

The story continues below the image.

Odd Nerdrum often puts himself in unflattering poses. This is titled “Self portrait as a dog.” PHOTO: Fineart

Most national newspapers appear to have ignored Nerdrum’s exhibition. He did, however, find a friend in the right-wing website *Document.no*, whose reviewer Paul Grøtvedt hailed Nerdrum’s project as “a bright spot in artistic terms, but at the same time a pitch dark account of the spirit of our time, and its rejection of values and hatred for culture.”

The exhibition comes less than a year after another tense encounter between Nerdrum and Norway’s art establishment. In the autumn of 2021 he was rejected at *Høstutstillingen*, a key annual art event in Norway. The rejected piece, a large painting called *Tre menn i en båt* (Thee men in a boat), went on display at the Fineart gallery instead. That time, the artist himself actually showed up, explaining he had intended the painting “to pave the way a little” for gifted artists he knows of, both in Norway and abroad. He also told media, “I’m used to being rejected quite a few places, and in many (different) situations.”

Odd Nerdrum never made it easy for himself. When he joined Norway’s State Academy of Art in 1962, he wanted to paint figuratively in the classic sense, but his modernist curriculum was packed with the abstract. His teachers “couldn’t teach me anything,” he once recalled. According to [an unsigned biography published by Fineart.no](#), Nerdrum literally saw the light during a student excursion, faced with a glowing Rembrandt in Sweden’s National Museum. His fellow students were busy studying Warhol and Picasso over at Stockholm’s Modern Museum. So he quit the academy, opting instead to educate himself by



learning from artists who had been dead for centuries. In 1965 he attended Kunstakademie Düsseldorf, a classic German art school.

The story continues below the image.

The exhibition's title piece, "You see we are blind". PHOTO: Fineart

Among his mentors in early life was the late **Jens Bjørneboe, a controversial Norwegian author** who also taught at the private Rudolf Steiner school in Oslo. Bjørneboe worried that Nerdrum's self discipline would isolate him from fellow students. But in his final assessment, Bjørneboe wrote that "Odd is perhaps the most unusual and original student I've ever had. In many ways he's a lonesome bird, but he is interested in many things and therefore connects with others easily," wrote Bjørneboe, as quoted by D2.

Similar things were said the first time Nerdrum's art appeared in public, at a group exhibition in Oslo in 1964. His figurative, "oldmasterly" style made him stand out from the other invited artists.

Nerdrum's first separate exhibition took place in 1967, when he was 23. "I see our present from a diagnostic point of view," he said at the time. "I try to depict the world we are in and the one that's coming."

By that time, commentators called his work things like a romantic-realistic protest against modernism, and a "special Norwegian phenomenon." One art historian, Gunnar Sørensen, reckoned that "neither Rembrandt nor Velazquez are Nerdrum's closest kindred spirits. He rather belongs in the tradition from Tidemand, Christian Skredsvig and Christian Krohg."

The young and largely unknown Nerdrum was noticed for a slightly different reason, too. A painting he had called *Tidens skjønnhet* (Beauty of the times) was used as cover art on the first double album ever released in Norway: The 1971 *Friendship* by Junipher Greene, an influential "progressive rock" band at the time. According to newspaper *Dagbladet*, Nerdrum had painted it a couple of years earlier.



PHOTO: Junipher Greene

"Odd had lined up several paintings that we could choose from. We paid him NOK 250 for the rights to use his painting on our album cover," Geir Bøhren, a band member, once recalled when interviewed by newspaper *Dagbladet*. The amount equals around NOK 2,200 (USD 250) today.

Friendship has been rated the best Norwegian album ever, and the first edition of it is a valuable collector's item. Preparing a re-release of the album in 2008, Bøhren asked Nerdrum where the painting could be found.

"Odd told me that he'd destroyed the picture along with more of his early works. He said they were work from his youth that he was not happy with," Bøhren told *Dagbladet*.

The *Dagbladet* article also shed some light on the techniques used by the young Nerdrum. According to one of his fellow artists, Johan Gulbranson, the group of elegant young trendies seen in *Tidens skjønnhet* were not in the same room when painted. Instead they came one by one to Nerdrum's studio behind *Kunstnernes Hus* (The Artists' House) in Oslo where they were added to the picture. Some of the models were friends whom Nerdrum often painted at the time.

"He had set up a mirror at the other end of the room which he looked at when working. Thus, he painted us from our mirrored image, He never looked at us," Gulbranson recalled.

In 1978 Nerdrum unveiled *Mordet på Andreas Baader* (The Murder of Andreas Baader), rated as one of the most political pictures ever made by a Norwegian artist. The huge painting appears to depict a murderous terrorist as a martyr. Andreas Baader was convicted in Germany of multi-manslaughter and other serious crimes as the head of the Baader-Meinhof terrorist group, and died in his prison cell. According to an official inquiry, the death was a suicide. But a popular conspiracy theory in European left-wing circles at the time would have it that he was murdered by the authorities.

The painting stirred controversy in Norway and internationally, not least in West Germany. As model for Baader's face, Nerdrum used Trygve Hegnar, an editor and investor.



In the 1980s, Nerdrum changed his style considerably. His colorful romantic realism was replaced by a gloomier view of the world, adding darkness, symbols and suffering humanoids in brutal landscapes, sometimes wearing helmets. Harald Flor, a *Dagbladet* art critic, wrote enthusiastically about "the new Nerdrum," and found his fresh work far more original than that of previous decades. During his long absence from public life, Nerdrum has perhaps refined this theme, resulting in the mostly disturbing works now on display.

Odd Nerdrum has defined his art as "kitsch" since 1997, and describes himself as a "kitsch painter" who is part of a "kitsch movement." Kitsch is normally used about art that's poor, cheap or fake. It's believed that Nerdrum chose to use the term sarcastically, as a poke at his critics.

*Nerdrum in 2020, wearing his trademark hat. PHOTO:
Wikipedia Commons/By Kulttuurinavigaattori*

Nerdrum has a history of reaching out to fellow artists. For decades, he cooperated with Norwegian colleagues like Karl Erik Harr, Arne Paus and Bjørn Fjell in organizing a series of art exhibitions titled "Romanticism and realism." He likes to advise younger artists, too, making for the term "Nerdrum students." Among them are Trine Folmoe, Sverre Koren Bjertnæs and others. A 2013 book, *The Nerdrum School: The master and his students*, contains works by more than 80 Nerdrum students from around the world.

His art school is based in Stavern, a small town on the shores of the Oslo fjord. Nerdrum reportedly doesn't charge his students anything, and he doesn't read applications to join, but he does look for talent.

"They're here as students and assistants," Nerdrum told *D2*. "I'm not a good teacher, but I can teach them quite a bit about philosophy." He added that his students all share a disinterest in modernism: "The students aren't properly at home in modern society. They don't recognize it. Typical for modern people is that no one needs to go in-depth. We have robots to do that."

[newsinenglish.no](http://www.newsinenglish.no)/Morten Møst



- *You see we are blind* will run in Oslo until April 13. On April 27 part of it will reopen as *You see we are blind II* in Stavanger's BGE Contemporary Art Projects with more works added.

