



Written by [Luis Miguel](#) on September 29, 2023

Artist Who Submitted Empty Canvases Appeals Court Order to Return Cash

A legal struggle between a creator of modern “art” and the museum that commissioned him for a piece demonstrates the absurdity of the modern art movement, and highlights the fact that such art is more about deconstructing what makes Western civilization great than it is about actually creating works of beauty.

As [The Associated Press](#) reports, Danish artist Jens Haaning last week was ordered by a court in Denmark to repay 492,549 kroner (\$69,894) to Kunsten Museum in Aalborg after the court found him in violation of his contract. Haaning’s lawyer, Peter Schønning, says they are appealing the ruling.



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The museum sued Haaning due to a public spat between it and the artist. Back in 2021, Kunsten Museum commissioned Haaning to recreate two of his earlier works, which had featured bank notes attached to canvases. This was supposed to symbolize the average annual wage in Denmark and Austria.

But rather than do that, Haaning handed the museum two blank canvases as his submission, titling his piece “Work It Out.” The artist said the canvases were blank in representation of his work situation. As for the bills the museum had provided him for use in the piece — Haaning pocketed the cash.

Thus, he got an especially large payday, keeping the money that was intended for use in the commission, as well as his actual artist’s fee of 25,000 kroner (\$3,900). The move caused a stir, and the Kunsten Museum was incensed, but they put his blank canvases on display anyway.

Ultimately, the dispute made its way through the court. On September 18, the District Court of Copenhagen ruled that Haaning is allowed to keep 40,000 kroner (\$5,676) from the original sum the museum handed to him, since the museum went ahead with his work and had it on display from Sept. 24, 2021 to Jan. 16, 2022.

However, the court determined that the artist is responsible for returning the rest of what was given to him, as the contract between him and the museum specified that the cash was to be used in the artwork and then returned afterward upon the conclusion of the exhibit.

Haaning has defended himself, in part by claiming that the “work” he produced was superior to what he contractually agreed to. “I saw, from my artistic point of view, that I could create a much better piece for them than what they could imagine,” he told Jacqui Palumbo and Oscar Holland of [CNN](#). “I have created an art piece, which is maybe 10 or 100 times better than what we had planned. What is the problem?”



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Throughout all this, the artist has denied committing any crimes and has insisted that his empty frames were a legitimate work of art. In fact, according to Haaning, his act of breaching the contract and illicitly pocketing tens of thousands of dollars *is* his art.

“I will go so far to say that the piece is that I have taken the money,” he told [The New York Times](#)’ Marc Tracy. “The two empty frames [are] actually a representation of the concept. *So more important than the absence of money is that I’ve taken the money.*” (Emphasis added.)

That last statement is the icing on the cake, and perfectly encapsulates the arrogance and solipsism that underlie the so-called “modern art” movement. According to Haaning, we’re not allowed to criticize his outright theft because, in his own words, the stealing of the museum’s money is actually part of the artwork.

“It’s ok, everyone! There’s no wrongdoing here. Lying, cheating, and stealing is OK so long as it’s done in the name of art.” Apparently, anything is moral and justifiable and beyond reproach so long as you add an “art” label to it.

But Haaning’s stunt is the logical conclusion of the whole modern art movement, which, unlike classical art, is not concerned with creating beauty but with challenging norms, deconstructing standards, and prioritizing moral and aesthetic subjectivity over all else.

That’s why modern artists believe that scribbling aimlessly on a canvas like a kindergartner or sticking a rusty can on a stand is legitimate art — just as or more deserving of praise than the Sistine Chapel.

Just have a look at what passes for art nowadays:

This short video below does an excellent job of lampooning not only the ridiculousness of what qualifies as art these days, but the fact that these pieces are often sold for astronomical sums:

Classical art, like classical philosophy, literature, and other pursuits, came from a culture with a strongly biblical moral basis in which it was universally accepted that there are objective standards of truth, goodness, and beauty.

Modern art, on the other hand, is the product of a culture of relativism in which each individual is a world who can determine what is good, true, and beautiful for himself.

The end result is that greatness is no longer to be aspired to; laziness and lack of creativity are deemed to be just as properly “art” as anything else. And now even outright criminality is an art.

As a society, we’re going to have to nip this “modern art” in the bud before theft and murder are legalized on the basis of free artistic expression.



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