

AUTHENTICATION
IN ART

AiA Art News-service

the guardian

Man who made £30,000 faking Norman Cornish artwork told to repay £1

Richard Pearson, jailed in January for selling 14 forged drawings and paintings, to pay only nominal sum due to lack of assets



Renowned 'pitman painter' Norman Cornish, who died in 2014.
Photograph: Rebecca Flounders/Rex

[Frances Perraudin](#) North of England reporter

[@fperraudin](#)

Tuesday 22 August 2017 10.15 BST Last modified on Tuesday 22 August 2017 10.35 BST

A con artist who made more than £30,000 selling artworks he claimed were by the renowned “pitman painter” Norman Cornish has been ordered to repay £1.

Richard Pearson, 56, from Sunderland, was jailed in January for selling 14 faked drawings and pictures to a gallery in Northumberland. He admitted fraud and forgery charges and was sentenced to three years and seven months.

Suspicious were aroused when a restorer noticed that one of the canvases Pearson used was too new. A price on a receipt he claimed was from the 1960s was also spotted to be in decimal pounds and pence, rather than pounds and shillings, and a telephone number he used was too long.

During a proceeds of crime hearing on Monday, Neil Pallister, prosecuting, said after “a rigorous financial investigation” it was discovered that Pearson had no assets. However, he was told that any he came into would be confiscated.

Guardian Today: the headlines, the analysis, the debate - sent direct to you

[Read more](#)

“The total benefit figure, which is not disputed, is the sum of £31,650,” Pallister said. “A financial investigator has made inquiries and had come to the conclusion there are no available assets.

“The application today is for a confiscation order to be made in the form of a nominal sum of £1. The matter can be reviewed regularly to see if the defendant comes into the possession of any assets.”

The judge, Edward Bindloss, ordered Pearson, who appeared via video link, to pay the sum within 28 days. The gallery that bought the forged works sold four of them to private collectors. It was later forced to refund the money.

[Norman Cornish, a former miner who died in August 2014](#), was known for his paintings of industrial life in the north-east. A contemporary and friend

of LS Lowry, he was one of the last surviving members of the so-called pitmen's academy art school, which was run for miners at Spennymoor Settlement in County Durham.

Reading a statement from the artist's family after the original trial, Cornish's son-in-law, Michael Thornton, said Pearson's sentence should serve as a warning to fraudsters, and that the destruction of the fakes would restore confidence in the market.

"The public will also be assured to know that Northumbria and Newcastle universities are jointly developing a profile of all materials used by Norman Cornish, so that in the future instrumental analysis can be used to help determine authenticity," he said.