



AiA Art News-service



# Prison sentences and million-euro-damages for art forgery gang

Four people were slapped with custodial prison terms while two others received suspended sentences for their role in an art forgery scam. One person was declared innocent.



11. Reidar Särestöniemi "Keltainen aavikko - joulun tuike" Öljyväri / esitietoisuus, koko 80 x 120 cm. Alkuperäinen perinteisellä tekniikalla "Reidar Särestöniemi" -maalauksella -70-luvulta. Teos on väärentetty.

A Reidar Särestöniemi painting suspected by police to be a counterfeit. Image: Poliisi

The Pirkanmaa District Court has sentenced four people to prison terms for a large-scale art forgery scam that netted them 1.3 million euros. Two other defendants involved in the scheme received suspended prison sentences, while one other person was freed of all charges.

The criminal enterprise saw some 115 forged counterfeit artworks sold to more than 30 private and corporate buyers in 20 Finnish towns and cities over a period of more than 10 years.

The counterfeit crew was believed to have earned a total of some 1.3 million euros from sales of the bogus collector's items.

The longest prison sentence handed down by the court was for aggravated fraud, aggravated forgery and fraud. One of the accused received an 18-month suspended sentence for aggravated money laundering and another drew a suspended 10-month sentence for aggravated fraud.

### Court orders gang to pay 1.2 million in damages

The five defendants who appeared in court admitted to their roles in fencing the artwork, but denied knowing that they were forgeries. One person denied having anything to do with selling the paintings.

The convicted group have been called upon to pay damages to the tune of 1.2 million euros. [A Lempäälä artist](#) who had painted about 80 of the bogus works of art had previously received a suspended prison sentence in January 2017.

An analysis of the artwork by the Finnish National Gallery found all 115 to be forgeries. The paintings have since been confiscated and will be handed over to the state.

The phony pieces featured forged autographs by the famous artists purported to have created them, including Akseli Gallen-Kallela, Helene Schjerfbeck, Eero Järnefelt and Reidar Särestöniemi. The most expensive piece sold, a painting fraudulently signed by Gallen-Kallela, which depicts the Imatrankoski rapids, fetched a price of 135,000 from a private buyer.

The court began hearing the welter of charges in the case in March and wrapped up hearings in May. The sentences handed down are not yet enforceable as the defendants may appeal their verdicts.