

FRIEZE

Gallerist Who Placed 'Heroin Spoon' Protest Sculpture Outside Purdue Pharma Avoids Jail Time

Fernando Alvarez was arrested in June for leaving a 300-kilogramme steel artwork outside Purdue's headquarters

IN NEWS | 18 SEP 18



The 'heroin spoon' artwork placed outside Purdue Pharma's Stamford offices. Courtesy: Domenic Esposito

Gallerist Fernando Alvarez, arrested in June for placing a giant ‘heroin spoon’ sculpture outside Purdue Pharma’s headquarters in Stamford, Connecticut, in protest at the US opioid crisis, has been received into a probation programme, the *Associated Press* reports. A state judge accepted accelerated rehabilitation for Alvarez. The charge of obstruction of free passage will be removed from his record on successfully completing a probationary period of one year.

Alvarez and artist Domenic Esposito made headlines in June when the pair left a 300-kilogramme steel sculpture, modelled in the shape of a ‘heroin spoon’, in front of Purdue Pharma’s offices. Esposito was reportedly inspired to make the artwork through his own brother’s battle with heroin addiction. Alvarez was charged with criminal misdemeanour and felony charges after refusing to remove the artwork from the driveway.

The spoon sculpture was intended as a protest of the pharmaceutical company’s alleged role in the US opioid crisis. ‘The bigger picture [...] is the importance of creating awareness for the right type of accountability,’ Alvarez told *Time* in June. ‘The justice department and the country has to start putting some of these people behind bars.’

At the beginning of the year, celebrated photographer Nan Goldin revealed details about her own opioid addiction after being prescribed OxyContin – manufactured by Purdue – following surgery. The controversial painkiller has been held responsible by many for overdose deaths in the US. Goldin announced a campaign against Purdue Pharma and associated Sackler family members who are the company’s majority owners.

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Goldin and her activist group Prescription Addiction Intervention Now (P.A.I.N.) have since drawn attention to arts institutions which have benefited from the Sacklers’s philanthropy, in a series of high-profile protests at galleries including the **Metropolitan Museum of Art** and Harvard Art Museums. Purdue Pharma denies claims that it improperly marketed Oxycontin and has said that it has taken steps to support treatment programmes and limit drug abuse.