The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
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Anti-War Artist Flees Russia After Thwarted Victory Day Protest

May 13, 2022

Danila Tkachenko / facebook

An award-winning artist said Friday that he fled Russia after security forces uncovered his plan to disrupt the country's annual Victory Day parade with a peaceful protest against the war in Ukraine.

Danila Tkachenko said he purchased 140 blue-and-yellow smoke grenades and installed them in air conditioners that he placed outside an apartment building near the Kremlin. The devices were set to go off remotely, spreading the colors of the Ukrainian flag into the air as Russian military hardware paraded across Red Square.

Victory Day commemorates the Soviet Union's victory over Nazi Germany in World War II and is a public holiday in Russia. More than 11,000 soldiers took part in this year's parade.

Writing on Facebook on Friday, Tkachenko said Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB) discovered plans for the stunt despite the fact that he had told no one about his intentions.

The authorities opened a criminal case against him on May 9, the day of the Victory Day parade, he said.

He added that his friends and family have been subjected to raids and questioning by law enforcement and that authorities have threatened to open a criminal case against his mother.

“I left Russia, but now my relatives and friends are in danger,” he wrote.

Tkachenko is a Russian documentary photographer best known for his series “Restricted Areas” and “Escape,” the latter of which won him a World Press Photo first prize.

The artist caused controversy in 2017 when he burned down several houses in an abandoned Russian village as part of a photography project.

Shortly after President Vladimir Putin sent troops into Ukraine, Russia passed a law making it a felony punishable by up to 15 years in jail to spread “fake news” about the Russian Armed Forces.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2022/05/13/anti-war-artist-flees-russia-after-thwarted-victory-day-protest-a77676