

Historical Legal Iconology: Law and Image from the Middle Ages to the 21st Century

'Law' and 'image(s)' interact in many ways. Traffic signs, for instance, are at the same time 'rules' and 'images'; legislation on the protection of minors prohibits and penalizes the exhibition of obscene art; artists risk to be held civilly liable when offending individuals or protected minorities by mocking them in cartoons, etc. There is actually a lot of 'law on art', and all of these rules can be seen as part and parcel of the vast research field of 'law and iconography', and 'law and art'. However, subject of the Lisbon lessons will not be 'law on art', but rather 'art on law'. This theme will be studied from a historical point of view. What will be focused on, is the representation of law, justice, legislation, and other legal concepts through time. As such, the research field of 'law and the image', just like 'law & literature', 'law & cinema', 'law & theatre'... belongs to the vast and booming scholar area of 'law and the humanities', studying legal phenomena from the point of view of other social and cultural sciences, in our case art history.

The following themes will be treated.

A first topic is the so-called 'verticality of the law': how art is used to legitimize judicial and legal power. Looking at the 'places of justice administration', starting under a tree in prehistoric times, passing by the medieval church entrances and the Renaissance painting of divine and historical *exempla iustitiae*, over the 'templar' architecture of nineteenth century palaces of justice, to the present day transparent office buildings of our contemporary courts, there is a connecting thread: worldly men (and recently women) deciding cases over their compatriots, try to legitimize their power by stressing the 'higher' origin of their competence.

Signs, symbols, gestures and tools: legally telling details in (religious and profane) art. Lady Justice's blindfold, sword and scales, an 'iconographic construction' of the Renaissance, are still understood today as symbols of justice and law. Many other symbols and signs, however, but also objects and (portrayed) gestures, in our contemporary eyes, do no longer spread the message they sent to spectators in earlier centuries. It is an interesting quest for jurists and legal historians to go and visit museums, using 'legal (historical) spectacles'. Artistic iconography was undoubtedly influenced by law. Left and right, for instance, have an important legal meaning; the overall (religious) influence of the antithesis 'good and bad' was paramount; colors of cloths can tell us about the goodness or badness of the persons wearing them; a branch of a tree can tell us that the man holding it is a judicial officer; the use of a glove can refer to marriage, etc. Very few paintings or other works of art explicitly deal with law and justice as such, but quite often, juridical elements are present, be it very often as hazardous details.

Jurists exalted and fooled: For centuries artistic creation was all about religion..., only the king and the higher nobility being able to command portraits. It is striking that jurists were the first non-nobles and non-religious to have their portraits painted. This tells a lot about the social positions jurists were able to rise to, being professors, councilors, judges and advocates. But pretty soon, the juridical guild was also criticized, in songs and stories, but also in pictorial art. We see them represented as vultures, foxes, wolves and monkeys. Especially their hunger for money is portrayed. Images indeed can be used to both exalt and fool the men of law.

Historical legal iconology: After having studied the forgoing examples, we will be able to define what historical legal iconography and iconology are, what methods they use, and which are the basis handbooks and tools available for study.

Evaluation will be done on the basis of a paper – historically, legally and artistically – commenting one or several works of art.

This intensive course will be taught in English and is supported by richly illustrated PowerPont presentations.

Questions and answers will be in English, French or Portuguese.

Recommended literature:

- *Stefan HUYGEBART, Georges MARTYN, Vanessa PAUMEN & Tine VAN POUCKE, The Art of Law. Three Centuries of Justice Depicted, [exh.cat. Groeningemuseum Bruges 28.10.2016-05.02.2017], Tielt, Lannoo, 2016, 205+3 p.*
- *Stefan HUYGEBART, Georges MARTYN, Vanessa PAUMEN, Eric BOUSMAR & Xavier ROUSSEAUX (eds.), The Art of Law. Artistic Representations and Iconography of Law and Justice in Context, from the Middle Ages to the First World War, Cham, Springer International Publishing, 2018, xxiii+458 p.*
- *N. ILLMAN MEYERS, "Painting the law", Cardozo arts and entertainment law journal, 14, 1996, 397-406.*
- *Georges MARTYN, "Inspiring Images for Judges. Late Medieval Court Room Decorations in the Southern Netherlands", in A. KÉRCHY, A. KISS & G. SZÖNYI (eds.), The Iconology of Law and Order (Legal and Cosmic), Szeged (Hungary), Jatepress, 2012, 41-53.*
- *A.L. NETTEL, "The power of image and the image of power: the case of law", Word and Image, 21, 2005, 527-539.*