

EVENTS AND CONFERENCES

Editorial Note

Cultural Heritage Law Conferences in the Age of Global Pandemic – Part Two

In the previous volume of the “Santander Art and Culture Law Review” (SAACLR) we published a short chronicle/overview of international cultural heritage law conferences held in 2020, a year deeply affected by the COVID-19 global pandemic. In fact, many important research and academic events on cultural heritage law were postponed, cancelled, or moved online. In 2021, the academic community, experts, and the general public adjusted more easily to the new conditions, and in fact a vast number of webinars, seminars, and workshops, as well as major scientific and expert conferences were organized online or in hybrid format.

From this wide array of excellent international cultural heritage law conferences held this year, by a way of example the following events can be recalled. In Spring, the Art, Cultural Institutions and Heritage Law Committee of the International Bar Association (IBA) presented a virtual conference “Art Disputes and How to Avoid Them” (14 April, 28 April, and 12 May), which focused on due diligence and Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR). It is worthy of mention that the annual conferences of international law associations, American Society of International Law (ASIL, 24-26 March 2021; fully online) and the European Society of International Law (ESIL, 8-11 September 2021; in hybrid format) also featured sessions or panels devoted to the cultural dimensions of current international law and practice. In addition, a special two-day online seminar was organised by the Committee on Participation in Global

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Cultural Heritage Governance, entitled “Cultural Heritage, Participation & Sustainable Development” (6-7 July 2021), and hosted online by Strathmore School of Law in Nairobi, Kenya. This year, the Art Market Studies Association (TIAMSA) also organized its annual conference (moved from 2020): “The Art Market and the Museum: Ethics and Aesthetics of Institutional Collecting, Display and Patronage from c.1800 to the Present” (6-7 May, 3 June, 15-16 June 2021), hosted online by the University of Edinburgh and National Galleries Scotland. This conference addressed the key aspects of the present-day debate on the role, functions, and ethics of museums undertaken on the eve of the 26th ICOM General Conference, to be held in August 2022, which will again discuss the new definition of museum.

Alongside other events and webinars hosted by international societies, a large number of events in 2021 were held by universities and other academic centres. We would like to recall just three of them as they addressed matters of tremendous topical concern. On 22 September, the University of Bonn and the Court of Arbitration for Art (CAfA) jointly held a webinar: “Settling Art Disputes by Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR): Future and Challenges in Germany and Worldwide”. This roundtable outlined the difficulties of litigating art disputes in national courts and offered insights and expectations on the future prospects and challenges of settling art disputes via ADR, including the envisaged role of the CAfA. The same week of September (23-24), the UNESCO Chair in the International Law of the Protection of Cultural Heritage, the Department of Public International Law and International Organization of the Law Faculty and the Global Studies Institute of the University of Geneva organized the international colloquium, “Decolonizing Heritage – The Return of Cultural Objects to Africa: An International Law Perspective”. This conference reviewed the history of colonial spoliations and analysed the legal obstacles and practical challenges to restitution, as well as the solutions available to African States and Indigenous peoples wanting to recover their cultural heritage. Finally, the Sapienza University of Rome held two large international conferences (in hybrid format) that addressed how international law can respond to the volume of current threats to cultural heritage worldwide caused by wilful damage and plunder. The first event, “The Intentional Destruction of the Cultural Heritage of Mankind (IDCHM): What Are the Remedies under International Law?” was held on 2-3 December at the Faculty of Law, while the second one, “The Protection of Cultural Heritage in Times of Peace and in Times of Armed Conflict”, was organized by the Department of Political Sciences of Sapienza University and McGill University of Montréal, on 14 and 16 December. Both events gathered together a number of leading scholars and practitioners engaged in the protection of cultural heritage.

This year was also marked by the 41st session of the UNESCO General Conference in November, which established a common strategic vision and key priorities of this global organization in respect of science, education, and culture for the next eight years. Moreover, in 2021 many statutory bodies of UNESCO, and other

international and regional organizations held meetings to catch up on works delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

It seems that in 2021 we were more prepared to face the challenges of the hegemony of online formats of communication and human societal interaction. However, many problems observed since 2019 continue. The COVID-19 pandemic still deeply affects the sector of universities, cultural institutions (theatres, philharmonics, cinemas, museums, galleries, etc.), and tourism. As we diagnosed last year, lessons from the pandemic must still be learned by cultural policy makers in order to ensure the fullest enjoyment of cultural rights, comprising those attached to cultural heritage, in a rapidly changing social and technological reality.