

# THE AESTHETICS OF INTERNATIONAL LAW

Conference

12-13 May 2023

Central European University

Quellenstraße 51, 1100 Vienna, Austria

## GENERAL THEME

International law, like any other legal system, comes with its apparatus of images and aesthetics. When thinking about international law, some people visualize the grand décor of international courts; others the work of humanitarian staff in crises; yet others the bureaucratic corridors of international organizations. Some people see a thin net of rules cast over the anarchic sea of interstate relations; others a thick system of governance that reaches deep into the domestic sphere of states. Some people imagine a universal set of principles transcending national borders; others a site of struggle between competing legal traditions and worldviews. These images are not value-neutral, but contribute to our perceptions of how the system works, its promises and limits, its legitimacy and shortcomings.

A growing literature explores the aesthetic dimensions of international law and its modes of representation in painting, photography, sculpture, architecture, artefacts, theatre, literature, cartography, film, documentary, etc. However, these various perspectives remain largely independent of one another and have not yet found a forum to come together as a cross-disciplinary project. Moving from these premises, the participants in this two-day conference will critically discuss various modes of visualizing international legal processes and institutions and explore their significance for our understanding of the role of international law in different contexts and across different media.

## CALL FOR PAPERS

We invite the submission of paper proposals addressing the general theme of the conference. Papers focusing on general legal theory and papers addressing specific case-studies are equally welcome. These may relate to general international law, international economic, trade or investment law, the law of the sea, the law of diplomacy, international human rights, or any other field of international law. The questions that the contributions may wish to address include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Visual representations in international legal discourse: What kinds of imagery imbue the dominant narratives of international law? What do they reveal and obscure? Which actors

shape that imagery? What interests and agendas do they pursue? How do visual representations shape our perceptions of international law? And how can different representations foster alternative understandings of legal processes and institutions?

- Material artifacts and physical spaces: How do the layout, architecture, and décor of international institutions inform the legal practices that take place within their walls? What are the aesthetic codes of international law professionals, and how do they affect the (self-)perception of their activities? What role does the representation of physical objects play in the construction of international legal arguments?
- Literary aesthetics and persuasion techniques: Do international legal actors have literary sensibilities? What stylistic choices and strategies do they deploy in writing legal texts (e.g., judgments, resolutions, etc.)? What do individual choices indicate in a field that is often very formalistic and uniform? How does a particular writing style become embedded in the culture of an international institution? To what extent does the literary quality of an international legal text affect its persuasiveness or acceptance by its audience?
- Cartographies and spatial metaphors: What do the maps of international law look like? How do spatial representations of the world affect the work international lawyers do? How do cartographies shape international legal discourse and the construction of geographical, historical, economic, and political boundaries? What happens to our perceptions of international law when we replace old maps with new ones?

## INSTRUCTIONS FOR SUBMISSION

Abstracts of no more than 300 words must be submitted by **31 October 2022**. Together with the abstract, applicants should submit: (i) the author's name, affiliation, and contact details; and (ii) the author's CV, including a list of relevant publications (no more than 2 pages total).

The abstracts will be assessed by the organizers on the basis of: (i) originality and innovative nature of the work; (ii) relevance to the conference's themes; and (iii) representation across different geographic regions, career stages, and other factors. Only one abstract per author will be considered.

Successful applicants will be informed no later than **20 December 2022**.

Selected speakers must submit a paper (ca.6,000 words) by **17 April 2023**.

The conference will take place on **12 and 13 May 2023** at the Central European University campus in Quellenstraße 51, 1100 Vienna, Austria.

All submissions and communications should be filed via email ([conference\\_legalst@ceu.edu](mailto:conference_legalst@ceu.edu)). The subject line should begin with: 'Aesthetics of International Law'.

## EXPENSES AND FINANCIAL AID

There is no fee for participating in the conference. Participants are expected to cover their own travel and accommodation costs. However, in exceptional cases, we might be able to contribute to the travel and accommodation expenses incurred by selected speakers with demonstrable financial needs. Speakers seeking financial aid must file their applications upon acceptance of their abstract, and in any case no later than **15 January 2023**.