Protection of Cultural Heritage

War, Markets, and Museums

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The subject of this seminar is regularly in the news from the “Islamic State” destroying antiquities on religious grounds to major corporations pouring millions into restoring ancient sites to lawsuits against museums in possession of objects allegedly stolen during war and colonial occupation. The law on protection of cultural heritage is a well-recognized subfield of international law, also known as international art law. The course will cover what counts as cultural heritage and why humanity cares so deeply about it as demonstrated by the near-universal membership in the Convention on Illicit Trafficking of Cultural Property and the Hague Convention on the Protection of Cultural Property in Time of Armed Conflict. We will discuss the law and relevant institutions in the context of history, philosophy, and art.

This is a two-credit hour seminar. A prior course in international law is highly recommended but not required. Anyone who has not had a course in international law should contact the professor prior to the first session for introductory reading. Several current controversies from the world of cultural heritage protection will be selected as case studies. Students will focus on a case and present an argument on behalf of one side in the controversy. Presentations of this type are made before museum boards, courts, international organizations, and other forums. Evaluation will be based on class participation, the presentation, and a research paper. The course will use readings and materials selected by the professor. It is open to law students, Kroc MA students in peace studies, and graduate students in other disciplines, such as art history.