

In Conversation with *Vittoria Mastrandrea,* **Writer and Presenter of the** **Christie's Education Art Law Course**

Alexander (Sami) Kardos-Nyheim

Vittoria Mastrandrea is writer and presenter of the Christie's Education Art Law course and a PhD candidate in Law at the London School of Economics. She was previously a UK solicitor and has worked in the Art Transport department at Christie's. She is a member of both the Institute of Art and Law and the Association of Critical Heritage Studies.

CJLPA: Tell us a little about your background. How did your experiences culminate in a career in the law and teaching?

Vittoria Mastrandrea: I began my legal career as a trainee solicitor. I studied law at university and absolutely loved it, and also really enjoyed my Legal Practice Course. Whilst I learnt a huge amount during my training contract, I realised quite quickly that a life as a solicitor wasn't for me. I enjoyed the academic side of the law much more than its application and knew I wanted to get back into academic study in some form.

I had also always wanted to study art history, and to keep up this interest, I attended the evening lectures of an art history course with the University of Buckingham whilst I was training. Shortly after qualifying as a solicitor, I discovered the Art, Law and Business MSc course at Christie's Education, and realised this would enable me to combine my interests in a further academic degree. Following this, I worked at Christie's auction house in London for a year before I began teaching on the Art, Law and Business MSc. It was in this role that I discovered my passion for teaching as well as researching.

CJLPA: Can you tell us about what you are studying now?

VM: My current research as a PhD candidate at the London School of Economics interrogates the construction of objects declared as 'national treasures' in the United Kingdom, a designation that takes place as part of the export control process for cultural goods. I consider how such attribution can be understood theoretically, as well as investigating the change in status of the object as regards its legal, social, and political meanings.

The aim of my research is to understand more fully the implications of a system that determines whether items are nationally significant—both for the owner of that object, and for the public who may then consume that object as representative of their nationhood.

CJLPA: Why have you taught Art Law? And do you intend to go back to that?

VM: 'Art law' is an interesting term, because there is no specific body of law that we can point to and say 'that's art law'. It encompasses a significant range of legal practice areas, including contract, tort, property, administrative, and criminal law (amongst others). What I find fascinating is how the law is applied and adapted to work in an ever-changing field that can be unpredictable and fast-moving. Oftentimes, because of the nature of the art world, the law has to play catch-up, which is really interesting to observe. I definitely want to continue both teaching and researching in this field.

CJLPA: Where does your passion for law come from?

VM: My father is a quantity surveyor, but also qualified as a barrister and dispute resolver. When I was younger, we would often discuss legal issues at length over the dinner table. I consequently became fascinated by the law from a young age, and when it came to choosing university courses, my decision to study law came to me quite quickly. The only other subject I was interested in exploring was art history, but luckily my chosen career path now allows me to combine the two!

CJLPA: What are some career highlights for you?

VM: When I began teaching art law, it was clear to me that I had

found what I loved to do. Deciding to apply for that position was a big step for me, as I hadn't taught before. I'm so glad I did it, so that's definitely a highlight. And, of course, writing and presenting the Art Law course for Christie's Education Online is a recent highlight!

CJLPA: What key aspects of art law did you want to communicate when you were planning Christie's Education's Art Law online course?

VM: I wanted the course to be quite a broad overview of the key issues that often come up in the field. The wide scope of the course demonstrates that the subject encompasses a wealth of different legal practice areas, and I wanted this to come across to the students. From the start it was clear in my mind that the first lecture would need to cover key transactional issues. Whilst I wanted to cover the issues people frequently seem most interested in, such as authenticity and art crime, it was important for me to communicate to the students that the first thing to be concerned with is the regulation of art transactions and how important it is to be compliant with legal regulations.

CJLPA: What tools do the students take from this course into their professional careers? And do you have learning outcomes in mind?

VM: I hope that students who don't have a grounding in this area of the law will be able to use the course as an informative introduction. It is designed to be an overview from which students of the law can decide a route for further study, or for those who are involved in the art world but who do not have much knowledge about the legal implications of transacting in this field. The main learning outcome I want students to take from this is an understanding of key issues, and an interest in exploring further the topic (or topics) that interested them most.

CJLPA: What is the most rewarding part of teaching law for you?

VM: By far, the most rewarding part of teaching is seeing passion for a topic you are discussing ignite in students. Inspiring their interest and encouraging their own research is wonderful, because I find the field so interesting myself.

Alexander (Sami) Kardos-Nyheim is a third-year undergraduate in Law at Trinity College, Cambridge. He is the Founder and Editor-in-Chief of *CJLPA*. He has played an important role in efforts across London and Cambridge to protect communities and heritage assets from luxury redevelopment projects.
