

# The Image: An Interpretation

■ *Mekhala Dave*\*

This piece came about upon our discussion and love for the Oceans. At ASCOMARE, law of the sea attempts to demystify the Oceans from a legal standpoint, however, we recognized that a jarring gap remained with literacy of images for the Oceans. We may think of a few artists whose (re)creations from art of the Oceans have taken our breath away.

How much do we know of our Oceans, legally and scientifically? How can we think of the Oceans artistically? How do we connect and care for the Oceans? Do we feel it in our ears, smell, touch, or sight? How do we experience our contemporary (changing) times of the Oceans? We felt an imminent need to elucidate these questions that have not yet been entirely touched upon in the legal world. To inspire care for the Oceans culturally, we required artistic means and mediums to brainstorm. We consider this piece as a starting point to stir a dialogue with our contributors and readers. Even if questions remain unanswered, we hope the artwork as the book cover would justify what could not be entirely expressed in this piece – in carrying forward a unique visual interpretation from each of you.

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The inaugural issue of ASCOMARE on the Law of the Sea signifies change for the Oceans. The foreword poignantly describes the perception of reality, inspired by music.

Art, in the form of music, crafts or images offers us an insight into reality. Reality is conceived but with multiple perspectives and narratives. Upon this precise basis, law and its language have kaleidoscopic meanings but with a congruent purpose for us to all universally agree upon. Law's language is a constant evolution, told by stories, events, society and politics of our changing times.

ASCOMARE, with its inaugural issue, presents the interpretation of terms and meanings in the Law of the Sea to spark exchange of views and ideas.

Whilst the book immerses us into narrating legal language from different perspectives, the artwork as the book cover is an attempt to invite a dialogue on the literacy of images and its translation of the Oceans.

A translation of visual, emotive, and sensorial narratives of the Oceans.

The Oceans are a mysterious and spiritual force that inhabit the Earth.

Ceremoniously non-territorial by humans but marked by Ocean inhabitants, a world in its own shape and form, escapes humans' understanding and imagination of the Oceans.

The artwork brings us closer to the Oceans to the reality of wading with water, amplifying our imagination with Oceans.

A single image can have 1000 realities and perspectives. The image can sometimes translate what we cannot express with words. A powerful image touches a nerve in us that we cannot yet comprehend in words.

It serves as a point of connection to the life around us. Similarly, this artwork as a book cover may evoke our vocabularies that may not present itself on our tongues.

An artist who perceives an image in her mind thus imitates the environment around her with the image taken from the camera. Environment, as regarded in the foreword, is a space that is static in nature, however, it

changes according to our interpretation of it. The author Oscar Wilde in his essay (1889) *The Decay of Lying* emphasized that 'Life imitates Art far more than Art imitates Life.' This is the reverse of the philosopher Aristotle's concept of 'mimesis.' 'Mimesis' means that art draws inspiration from our environment. Anti-mimesis, which is Oscar Wilde's perceptive, is that life or our environment has aesthetics already which is realized by expressions from forms of art. Judge Alvarez, as quoted in the foreword, mentioned in the *Corfu Channel* case that international law must be a reflection of international life that is constantly evolving. Interestingly, one may experience 'anti-mimesis' that the [international] legal language *mirrors* life which is the changing relations with each other and to our environment. Legal language itself is also a way of storytelling of our fluctuating times. Storytelling may be often recorded by the medium and use of images.

Upon the vehicle of an image, Emma Critchley captures the aesthetics of our environment what is already there – for us to surrender to the image. Thus, the image draws our attention to our environment.

The artwork is conceived when the image is circulated and distributed for viewers' perceptions maintained in the image – a reality that explodes into 1000 realities.

This artwork, conceived by Emma Critchley, from her underwater photography and deep-sea dives brings us to consider her experience with water and the Oceans. She is applying spaces of philosophy, politics and the environment with the combination film, sound, photography, and installation to discover human relationships to our environment. The artwork was a precursor to her film '*Common Heritage*' (2019). The artwork was taken during the NARS Foundation residency in New York in 2015 and the artwork is titled '*Frontiers*' from a film still, 2016. Her research began on new frontiers which focused on a curious vessel that touches upon the ocean water to indicate a sublime yet apocalyptic feel of discovery. This leaves our eyes to trace possibilities of encounters with the artwork: who discovers, why the discovery, what is yet to be discov-

ered and have we (metaphorically) landed to discover further possibilities to the Oceans...?

As we maintain our individual experiences, we also consider hers in exchange of ours. The artist and we as viewers contemplate and comprehend history, politics, and language to describe the artwork. It is here that the clasp of the artist over the image diminishes and enters the arena of the viewers.

History and politics, and the ideas that fuel them sit in trial for us to consider changes within our environment.

Relating (or unrelating) with the artwork, it belongs to translating and narrating our environment.

We, as viewers, embark on the journey with the artwork bringing us to a closer understanding of the Oceans. Therefore, the power of an image and thus, presented as an artwork cannot be underestimated. However, what presents a challenge for us is the literacy of images: how do we read them, how do we connect to them and, how do we translate/mediate them?

Law, its language and art are not different from one another as we think it may be separated by two polarized fields. In fact, anti-mimesis, the thing which is life reverberates across both fields of law and art – both is imitated by Life, our relations, and the environment around us.

The artwork as the book cover constructs a beautiful sentiment not only to the contents of the authors contributions but to also the observations/responses of our readers.

We believe that a copy of this book, from artwork and texts from cover to cover, holds the key to '*Gesamtkunstwerk*'. It is a German term for 'total work of art' that originated in the 18<sup>th</sup> century for Opera, drama, and theatre. Borrowing the term loosely and upon (re)adaptation in this context, the readers experience a comprehensive dialogue with the authors' contributions and the artwork for the Oceans. Thus, this inaugural book isn't only a book. It is an homage and a 'total' immersive experience for the Oceans in which Life imitates Art, i.e., the anti-mimesis of our environment.

*Emma Critchley is an artist who uses a combination of photography, film, sound, and installation to continually explore the human relationship with the underwater environment as a political, philosophical and environmental space. She is Royal College of Art alumni, and her work has been shown extensively nationally and internationally. Recent works include 'Common Heritage', a film about the imminent threat of deep-sea mining for rare earth minerals and 'The Space Below', a large-scale public sound installation about underwater acoustic pollution made in collaboration with artist Lee Berwick and installed in the Greenwich Foot Tunnel for the launch of the UK National Maritime Museum's 'Our Ocean, Our Planet' season in 2020. In 2021, her film installation 'Witness', created during the Earth Water Sky residency programme with Science Gallery Venice launched in the Italian Pavilion of the Venice Architecture Biennale.*

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