

Faculty of Law
Institute for Interdisciplinary Legal Studies

LABORATORIUM LUCERNAIURIS

Layers of Law? Birkenau in the Reichstag

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UNIVERSITY OF LUCERNE, FROHBURGSTRASSE 3, ROOM 4.B47

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Gerhard Richter, Birkenau (937-1), 2014.
Oil on canvas. 260 x 200 cm. Gerhard
Richter Archive, Dresden, Germany.
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Gerhard Richter, one of Germany's most famous contemporary artists, painted the *Birkenau* cycle in 2014. *Birkenau* consists of four large abstract panels. Underneath the layers of paint are the outlines of four painted photographs. The images underneath, not visible but present, are based on the four rare photographs smuggled out of the gas chamber at crematorium V of Auschwitz-Birkenau. In 2017, a copy of *Birkenau* was installed in the entrance hall to the Reichstag.

In this talk, I share some of my initial thoughts on the *Birkenau* paintings. I pay attention to Richter's technique of layering paint and notice how the ostensible site of the images, the concentration camp, is rendered absent. At the same time, I pay attention to the site of their display on the threshold to a prominent legal space. In so doing, I question the dynamic between the artwork, the audience and the legal institution.



Laura Petersen is a PhD Candidate at the Centre for International Law and Humanities at the Melbourne Law School. Her cross-disciplinary research interests combine approaches to jurisprudence with German studies, literature and art. Nearing completion, her PhD thesis reconceptualises the genres and sites of restitutive practice in the aftermath of WWII. She was recently awarded a DAAD research grant to work on her new project on Gerhard Richter in the faculties of Law and Art History at LMU Munich in 2020.

The **laboratorium lucernaiuris** lecture series is designed to provide a public forum for intellectual exchange and to showcase cutting-edge research from around the world. Scholars are invited to report from their respective 'laboratories' and to present new insights into the 'alchemy' of current research at the intersections between law and other disciplines.

All lectures are free to attend. No registration is required.

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