

AT THE VANISHING POINT: ENCOUNTERS WITH THE SOUVENIRS, MERCHANDISE AND MEMORABILIA OF INTERNATIONAL LAW



Figure 1: A Barbie Doll, circa 1980s, sold to raise money for UNICEF

Curated by

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On display at

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AN INTRODUCTION TO THE EXHIBITION

International law is generally studied through its legal texts (treaties or judgments) or its institutions (the UN and related international bodies). This exhibition offers an alternative way of looking at international law: through the lens of its merchandise, memorabilia and souvenirs.

Bringing together forty significant artefacts from a larger collection, the exhibition highlights the different ways in which international law and its institutions are memorialised, commodified and represented in the public sphere. The collection includes souvenirs available for purchase in the gift shops of international institutions; products sold by commercial partners with the permission or collaboration of these institutions; products which otherwise engage with international law (including advertisements which invoke the power and prestige of international law to sell particular items); and written collections which memorialise the histories, institutions and characters of the international legal system. Befitting the exhibition space, in Fisher Library's Rare Books section, this latter category includes a number of old and rare books.

The exhibition invites viewers to consider the social lives of these artefacts and what these tell us about international law and its institutions. How do international organisations present themselves to the world (by way of their gift shops or commercial collaborations) and how does society at large perceive of international law and international institutions? What do these artefacts say about the role of international law in the social and cultural zeitgeist? How do objects become memorabilia, relics or fetishes for international law and international lawyers? And how do these objects tell a different story about international law's claims to authority and relevance from the traditional narrative presented through texts and institutions?

Brought together by four international lawyers from three different institutions, this collection uses the material products of international law as a window through which viewers – lawyers and laypersons alike – can explore the everyday life of international law.



Figure 2: Hermès scarf commemorating the 50th anniversary of the signing of the United Nations Charter
© Joachim Metz for Hermès 1995

THE SOUVENIRS, MERCHANDISE AND MEMORABILIA OF INTERNATIONAL LAW: CURATORIAL ESSAY

This exhibition asks us to look carefully at the souvenirs, merchandise and memorabilia of international law's institutions. What functions do these items serve, for the institutions, for the public, and for international law as a whole? How is international law represented? Who is international law's consumer? Juxtaposed against the texts of the Fisher Library's rare books collection, these international legal objects invite reflection on and engagement with the blossoming interest in international law's material culture, marketing, memorabilia, sentimental and touristic practices.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, academics around the world were forced to move their teaching online, live-streaming lectures that would have otherwise been delivered in person. During those awkward five minutes at the beginning of a Zoom, we waited for students to electronically file into our virtual waiting room, before starting the lecture. To 'kill some time', one among us (Emily) began showing the students some of the souvenirs she had collected in her international travels, specifically those ones related to international law. Over the course of 13 weeks, students were introduced to the Lego United Nations building, the Barbie doll version of Eleanor Roosevelt, depicting the former US First Lady in her role as one of the drafters of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and a Christmas tree ornament, in the shape of the United Nations building in New York. During Zoom chats accompanying the lectures, and in the anonymous student feedback at the end of the semester, many in the cohort commented on the objects, with students remarking on how fun they found it, and how it made international law somehow more 'real' to them.



Figure 3: A Toy 'Soldier' Figurine of a UN Worker Aiding an Injured Child

As scholars of international law, we have long been interested in the disconnect between international law's deep embeddedness in the world around us on the one hand, and the perception that international law is 'remote and technical: something that happens only far away at the UN, or when world leaders shake hands at lavish, highly securitized summits'¹ on the other. We each have an interest in the material dimension of international law: its objects, its aesthetic qualities, its public consumption and commodification. This exhibition builds on the material turn in international legal scholarship and longstanding critiques of its commodification and connections to time and memory.

Stemming from these engagements in our teaching and research, we began to look more critically at the souvenirs we had all accrued because of our professional careers as international lawyers – the various pens and mugs from international organisations and scholarly centres, the postcards and notepads and other ephemera we had collected while on research trips to the International Court of Justice in The Hague, the United Nations in New York and Vienna, or the International Committee of the Red Cross headquarters in Geneva. We were struck by the notion that, like a museum or art gallery, but unlike many institutions of government (for example, domestic courts of law), international law *merchandises* itself – there are gift shops at the International Criminal Court, the Peace Palace, and the UN that sell manifold varied and different items from clothes to office supplies, to homewares, and luxury goods. For example, a visit to the UN Headquarters in New York can be both a professional and a touristic experience with UN stamps, memorabilia, chocolates, and iconography all for sale. Suitably for an institution grappling with the digital era there is also an online gift shop.²

¹ Jessie Hohmann and Daniel Joyce, 'Introduction' in Jessie Hohmann and Daniel Joyce (eds), *International Law's Objects* (Oxford University Press 2018) 2.

² Official UN Gift Shop: <https://shop.un.org/>.



Figure 4: UN Salt and Pepper Shakers

In reflecting on the material objects of international law institutions like the UN and ICJ, we wanted to interrogate international law and international institutions through the lens of merchandise, memorabilia, and souvenirs. How do international organisations present themselves to the world (by way of their gift shops or commercial collaborations) and how does society at large perceive of international law and international institutions (through invocation of international law in commercial imagery and objects)? What do such objects and imagery say about the role of international law in the social and cultural zeitgeist? In this, we connect with vibrant and emerging strands of international law scholarship that focus on its objects and material culture,³ its marketing and marketization,⁴ sightseeing and tourism,⁵ and its everyday impact and experience.⁶

³ Hohmann and Joyce, *International Law's Objects*; Renske Vos and Sofia Stolk 'Law in Concrete: Institutional Architecture in Brussels and the Hague' (2020) 14(1) *Law and Humanities* 57; Daniel R Quiroga-Villamarin, 'Beyond Texts? Towards a Material Turn in the Theory and History of International Law' (2020) 23(3) *Journal of the History of International Law/Revue d'histoire du droit international* 466.

⁴ Christine Schwobel-Patel, *Marketing Global Justice: The Political Economy of International Criminal Law* (Cambridge University Press 2021).

⁵ Amanda Perry-Kessaris, 'The Pop-Up Museum of Legal Objects Project: An Experiment in "Socio-Legal Design"' (2017) 68(3) *Northern Ireland Legal Quarterly* 225; Sofia Stolk and Renske Vos, 'International Legal Sightseeing' (2020) 33(1) *Leiden Journal of International Law* 1.

⁶ Luis Eslava *Local Space, Global Life: The Everyday Operation of International Law and Development* (Cambridge University Press 2015).

Our exhibition, *At the Vanishing Point*, takes its name from an article written by Hersch Lauterpacht for the *British Yearbook of International Law* in 1952, in which he reflected on the recently adopted Geneva Conventions of 1949, relating to the treatment of persons in situations of armed conflict.⁷ At the end of his paper, Lauterpacht called on international lawyers to continue the process of developing and reaffirming the law of armed conflict, an area still beset with 'diverse problems'⁸ that 'will require clarification.'⁹ Lauterpacht implored his colleagues to undertake this task:

... regardless of dialectical doubts – though with a feeling of humility springing from the knowledge that if international law is, in some ways at the vanishing point of law, the law of war is, perhaps even more conspicuously, at the vanishing point of international law.¹⁰

At first glance, Lauterpacht's statement alludes to a common critique levelled at international law – that it is not 'really law' and thus exists in a liminal space on the edges of law so-called. Lauterpacht's scholarly project was in part to gain wider acceptance for international law – despite the centrality of states, he saw it as operating as a system of private law grounded in consent. His institutional efforts to solidify international law and to ground its practice in official reports, a developing jurisprudence and scholarly analysis, all point to a broader concern with the field's otherwise ethereal and political dimensions.¹¹ Without wishing to rehash rather tired subsequent debates as to whether international law really is law, it is notable that in countering this critique, international institutions have turned to the solidity of architecture, infrastructure and to affective tools of publicity and merchandising.

⁷ Hersch Lauterpacht, 'The Problem of the Revision of the Law of War' (1952) 29 *BYBIL* 360.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 381.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 381-2.

¹¹ See further Martti Koskenniemi, 'Hersch Lauterpacht (1897-1960)' in Jack Beatson and Reinhard Zimmermann (eds), *Jurists Uprooted: German-Speaking Emigré Lawyers in Twentieth Century Britain* (Oxford University Press 2004) 601-661.

Situating the Exhibition within the Field

Focusing upon the material dimension of international law's souvenirs, merchandise and memorabilia, allows us to explore and develop new ways of understanding the field. By engaging with questions of popular understanding of international law, publics can engage with otherwise technical and professional concerns, and international lawyers can see their concerns mediated through the symbolic, the sentimental, the mediated and in commodified forms. In this exhibition, we explore how international law's symbolic capital is supported through souvenirs and other material objects. How is authority tied to objects and iconography? How does international law's merchandise allow us to comment on the relationship between capitalism and international law? How do objects become memorabilia, relics or fetishes for international law and international lawyers? And how do souvenirs allow for different readings of international law's claim to authority and relevance? Are memorabilia suggestive of a personal connection to a field which can appear grand, distant and abstract? Do souvenirs point to the historical and temporal qualities of international law and its contingent evolution? We posit that in concentrating on the material things of international law, we can begin to understand the ways that international law structures and disciplines its subjects.¹²

As Eslava and Pahuja have written, international law is not just 'an ideological project with material consequences', but also 'a material project in itself.'¹³ Although this material turn is broad, we focus on material culture and material histories, 'beginning with objects, from the mundane to the museum piece' to 'think through how material things and laws are co-constituted, and to decentre text as the main arena for legal interpretation'.¹⁴ We are prompted by the questions¹⁵ and research agenda proposed

¹² Hohmann and Joyce, 'Introduction', 2.

¹³ Luis Eslava and Sundhya Pahuja, 'Beyond the (Post)Colonial: TWAIL and the Everyday Life of International Law' (2012) 45(2) *Journal of Law and Politics in Africa, Asia and Latin America - Verfassung und Recht in Übersee* 195, 202.

¹⁴ Jessie Hohmann, 'Diffuse Subjects and Dispersed Power: New Materialist Insights and Cautionary Lessons for International Law' (2021) 34 *Leiden Journal of International Law* 585, 589.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 589-91.

by Hohmann and Joyce, among others, to investigate what we might learn about international law and the way it works in the world if we begin with objects, things or material culture.¹⁶ Scholars working in this vein have focused on the role of everyday actors in the legitimisation, contestation or practice of international law and have harnessed artefacts and the world as tangibly experienced to consider international law as a material practice.

Further engaging international law's sites and places is a turn to explore the touristic and sightseeing practices of international law. Important here are Renske Vos and Sofia Stolk's work on legal sightseeing, Hilary Charlesworth's engagement with the UNESCO Human Rights Exhibition, and Maria Elander's work on the ECCC and Cambodian Genocide Museum.¹⁷ These scholars ask thought-provoking questions about modes of engaging with international law, sites of engagement, and everyday representations of international law. Another important strand of scholarship explores the marketing and marketization of international law. Christine Schwobel-Patel's important work critically assesses the now normalised branding and marketisation of international criminal justice, asking how its dominant figures and its core business have come to take on the techniques and language of brand and market.¹⁸ Our project extends these questions to merchandise and memorabilia, along

¹⁶ Hohmann and Joyce, 'Introduction', 1; Hohmann and Joyce, *International Law's Objects*; Madelaine Chiam, Luis Eslava, Genevieve Painter, Rose Parfitt and Charlotte Peevers, 'Introduction: History, Anthropology and the Archive of International Law' (2017) 5(1) *London Review of International Law* 3; see also the contributions in (2017) 5(1) *London Review of International Law*, special issue on History, Anthropology and the Archive of International Law; Renske Vos, 'Walking Along the Rue de la Loi: EU Façades as Front- and Backstage of Transnational Legal Practice' in Lianne Boer and Sofia Stolk (eds), *Backstage Practices of Transnational Law* (Routledge 2019); and Amanda Perry-Kessaris, 'Legal Treasures' and 'Pop Up Museum of Legal Objects' projects: <https://legaltreasure.wordpress.com/>; <https://econosociolegal.wordpress.com/2017/04/08/sociolegal-model-making-8-pop-up-museum-of-legal-objects/>.

¹⁷ Legal Sightseeing project: <https://legalsightseeing.org/>; Hilary Charlesworth, 'The Travels of Human Rights: The UNESCO Human Rights Exhibition 1950-1953' in Shane Chalmers and Sundhya Pahuja (eds), *Routledge Handbook of International Law and the Humanities* (Routledge 2021) 173-190; Maria Elander 'Images of Victims: the ECCC and the Cambodian Genocide Museum' in Maria Elander and Desmond Manderson (eds), *Law and the Visual: Representations, Technologies, and Critique* (Toronto University Press 2018) 210-228.

¹⁸ Schwobel-Patel, *Marketing Global Justice*.

with the commercial partnerships that these now entail, in other regimes of international law.

Turning then to the aims of *At the Vanishing Point* and its location: the aim of the exhibition was to examine how international law's symbolic capital is supported through souvenirs and other material objects. In hosting an exhibition, rather than producing a more traditional research output (like a research article), *At the Vanishing Point* aims to examine international law's objects as memorabilia, relics and souvenirs - allowing for different readings of international law's claim to authority and relevance. It rests on the understanding that the possibility of seeing - and sometimes even touching - an object enriches the experience of it and allows a deeper and more tangible experience of it.¹⁹

A Reflection on Place and Curation

The process of curating, and of displaying, represents an attempt 'to account for and order our own professional context.'²⁰ Curation is an activity of increasing interest to international lawyers who have become familiar with the popular deployment of the term in relation to social media, while also international legal scholarship and practices seek to better engage with publics. Clearly as lawyers we are not professionally trained to collect, archive, preserve, analyse or even to write about objects. But the material turn in international legal scholarship, accompanied by longstanding engagement with historical, cultural and sociological questions, has

¹⁹ Jessie Hohmann, 'The Treaty 8 Typewriter: Tracing the Roles of Material Things in Imagining, Realising and Resisting Colonial Worlds' (2017) 5(3) *London Review of International Law* 371. See also Joyce reflecting on cabinets of curiosity as motivated by the notion that knowledge was best obtained through first-hand encounters with an object. Daniel Joyce, 'International Law's Cabinet of Curiosities' in Hohmann and Joyce (eds), *International Law's Objects*, 21.

²⁰ Joyce, 'International Law's Cabinet of Curiosities', 16.

better equipped and motivated international lawyers to consider their own object-oriented practices.

While there will be those who deliberately seek out *At the Vanishing Point*, most of its audience will be accidental and incidental – people already in the library undertaking their own research, or on their way to jobs and appointments, or otherwise seeking the reflective calm of the library environment. The University of Sydney’s Fisher Library serves as a repository of knowledge and education. The site of the University of Sydney Camperdown campus has always been a place of knowledge and learning – it was built on the ancestral lands of the Gadi people – with the original site of Fisher, the Quadrangle, built on ‘land on which the Gadigal have been teaching and learning for thousands of years’.²¹ *At the Vanishing Point* seeks, among other objectives, to educate and challenge its viewers, by interrogating its subject field through the use of and lens of material objects. It does this by displaying these material objects in a place of education and learning - in a working and publicly accessible university library, an institution expressly designed for the collection, dissemination, and communication of knowledge and understanding, as well as a venue for challenging and interrogating traditional or conventional knowledge and understanding.

At the Vanishing Point draws on the well-established museum and gallery practice of thematic display. Thematic display has been theorised as a break from the traditional ‘chronological’ method of display that typified museum and gallery practice up until the 19th century,²² and allows for a more selective approach. Thematic displays frequently have ‘strongly education goals’²³ and allow for non-expert viewers to

²¹ The University of Sydney, *Walanga Wingara Mura Design Principles*, 8: <https://www.sydney.edu.au/content/dam/corporate/documents/about-us/values-and-visions/aboriginal-and-torres-straight-islander-community/walanga-wingara-mura-design-principles-plain-text.docx>.

²² Rhiannon Mason, Alistair Robinson and Emma Coffield, *Museum and Gallery Studies: The Basics* (Routledge 2017) 168.

²³ Louise Ravelli, *Museum Texts: Communication Frameworks* (Routledge 2005) 3.

engage with the material without requiring discrete specialised disciplinary knowledge.²⁴ The academic study of gallery and museum spaces is deeply rooted in the idea that:

[t]o display something is an act, and the way that museums and galleries display their collections sets up and frames the visitor's encounter, not just with individual objects but with the past more broadly ... the act of display can never be neutral for it produces particular ways of knowing and valuing objects.²⁵

As noted by Moser,²⁶ *how* one displays items is as important and informative as the *why* and the *what* of the items being displayed: 'allocations of space are often based on understandings of value, so that the collections, key objects or displays deemed to be most significant receive the most attention (e.g., by being placed in prominent or magnificent locations, or because they are given large quantities of space).'²⁷

And yet the items on display in this exhibition are *not* ones that you would typically find in museums or galleries. These items were found in second-hand and thrift stores, in gift shops, in old bookstores, and online vintage shops. Displaying the ordinary in a location dedicated to high knowledge presents an interesting juxtaposition of prosaic and privileged. Brought together these seemingly 'ordinary' artefacts become vehicles and signifiers of an internationalist sensibility. Their thematic display generates points of critique, connection and self-reflection. While curating international law involves new and challenging methodological territory and practices, there are aspects of curation which are deeply familiar. In scholarship, advocacy, teaching and professional development we each learn to select and inhabit aspects of international legal identity and form. We understand that lawyering involves selection, narrative and performance. Connoisseurship whilst initially

²⁴ See further Stephanie Moser, 'The Devil is in the Detail: Museum Displays and the Creation of Knowledge' (2010) 33 *Museum Anthropology* 22.

²⁵ Mason, Robinson and Coffield, *Museum and Gallery Studies*, 167.

²⁶ Moser, 'The Devil is in the Detail', 25-6.

²⁷ Mason, Robinson and Coffield, *Museum and Gallery Studies*, 173.

seeming beyond the scope of the traditional international legal research skill set is in fact strongly tied to notions of expertise and judging.

There is something therapeutic and fresh about curating international legal objects, though museum professionals might query our approach to curatorial practices. This is a beginning not the end, and we hope here to experiment with ways of collecting, displaying and understanding the material culture of international law. Yet the pull of traditional practices remain. It is hard to write this curatorial essay as 'curators' when we are trained to footnote and develop article, chapter or book length outputs. The temptation remains to turn this into a traditional output, though we seek here to develop interest and engagement in non-traditional outputs such as the exhibition and this accompanying essay. There is then the exhilaration and shock of the new involved in what we have collectively set out to do. 'Making' the exhibition itself forces us to confront the practical limits of certain of our conceptual desires. What stories will each visitor generate in this exhibition and does it make sense for non-lawyers?

Curation of this exhibition has been a social and collective experience, but it also draws on the personal, highlighting generative connections between objects and subject-formation. These objects on display can tell us important stories about international institutions and actors. Our collections reveal the interior worlds contained within professional lives. Here we invite our audiences to reflect on their own connections to and collections of international law souvenirs, merchandise and memorabilia. These talismanic objects become place markers in deeper personal trajectories and this can subvert or shift their institutional or thematic concerns. Curation is a fundamentally public activity and reminds us of the challenge involved in locating international legal publics. For whom have these objects been crafted and for what purpose? Curation allows us each to critically analyse the institutional politics and commodification involved in the creation and distribution of these objects, but also to re-interpret them through altering and at times even subverting their intended contexts and audiences.

If international law is in part a project of ordering and understanding the world, then making an exhibition of international legal objects provides the opportunity for staging a play within a play.²⁸

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Sydney, August 2023

²⁸ Wouter Werner, 'Framing Objects of International Law' in Hohmann and Joyce (eds), *International Law's Objects*, 57-71.



Figure 5: Villeroy and Boch plate for UNICEF

A PALACE OF PEACE FOR THE WORLD

International law institutions frequently, if perhaps unintentionally, serve as secular museums and temple complexes for those who practise in the field – nowhere is this more evident than at the Peace Palace in The Hague. The home of the International Court of Justice, the principal judicial organ of the United Nations, as well as the Permanent Court of Arbitration, the architectural design for the Palace was decided by a jury presiding over international submissions.

Two hundred and sixteen entries were received, with first prize going to French architect Louis Cordonnier, who envisaged a 15th century style palace. The architectural designs for the Palace can be seen in the works on display here (*The Peace Palace: Residence For Justice, Domicile Of Learning* and designs and plans in *The Palace of Peace at The Hague*) and the architecture and interior design of the complex is reflected in the souvenirs available at the gift shop at the Peace Palace, which include a scarf which reproduces the wallpaper in the Palace's Japanese Room, the Pax-o-Scope, which encourages visitors to view the complex through its kaleidoscope, and the Peace Dove, which calls on us to write messages of peace for the world.



Figure 6: A silk scarf sold at the Peace Palace, recreating the wallpaper in the Japanese Room



Figure 7: The Pax-o-Scope kaleidoscope viewer



Figure 8: A wooden peace dove trinket

GAME NIGHT AT THE UNITED NATIONS

The United Nations Headquarters in New York was designed as a mini-city unto itself. The Headquarters were built on a site in midtown Manhattan, thanks to a donation from American industrialist John D. Rockefeller.

The building was the result of work undertaken by international architects, including Le Corbusier and Oscar Niemeyer, who designed a complex where delegates could meet and debate the pressing issues of the day.

Among the facilities provided at UN Headquarters were a barber, a delegates dining room, a meditation room, a press bar, a shoe shine, and a chess room. Photos of these facilities are reproduced in *International Territory* by photographer Adam Bartos with a curatorial essay by Christopher Hitchens.

One wonders what Hitchens would have made of the board and card games that have sprung up around the United Nations and its Security Council, from the relatively benign *Game of Flags* to the more sinister *Game of World Domination*.

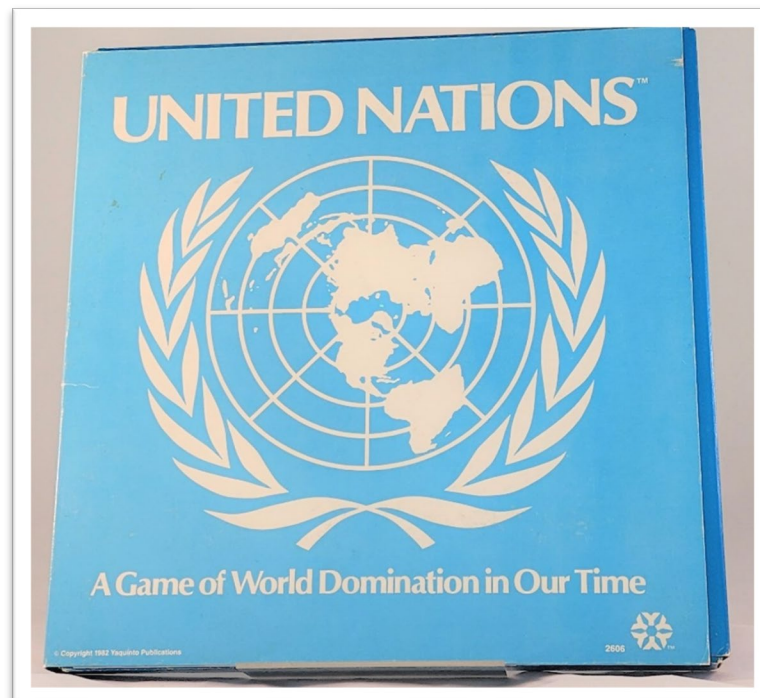


Figure 9: A UN board game

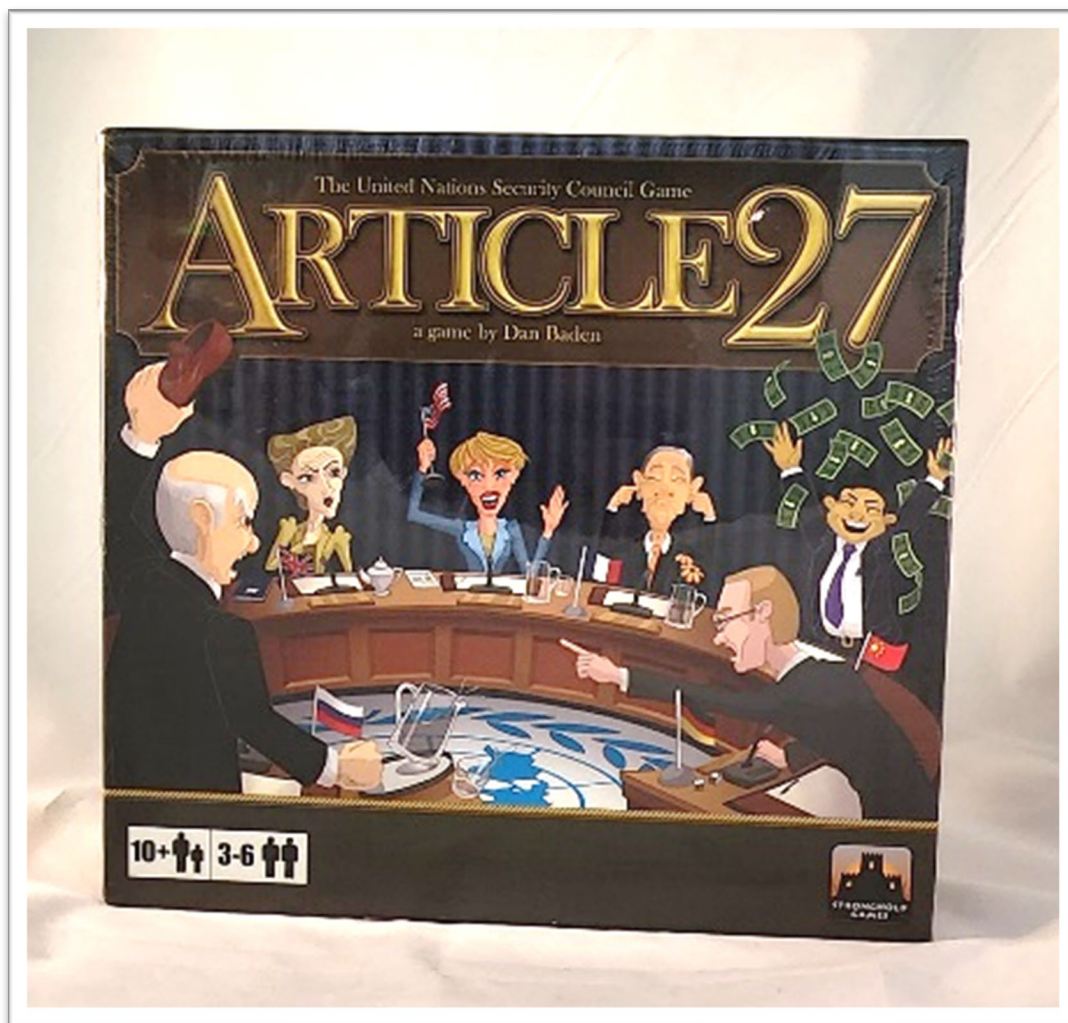


Figure 10: A board game based on the procedure of the UN Security Council

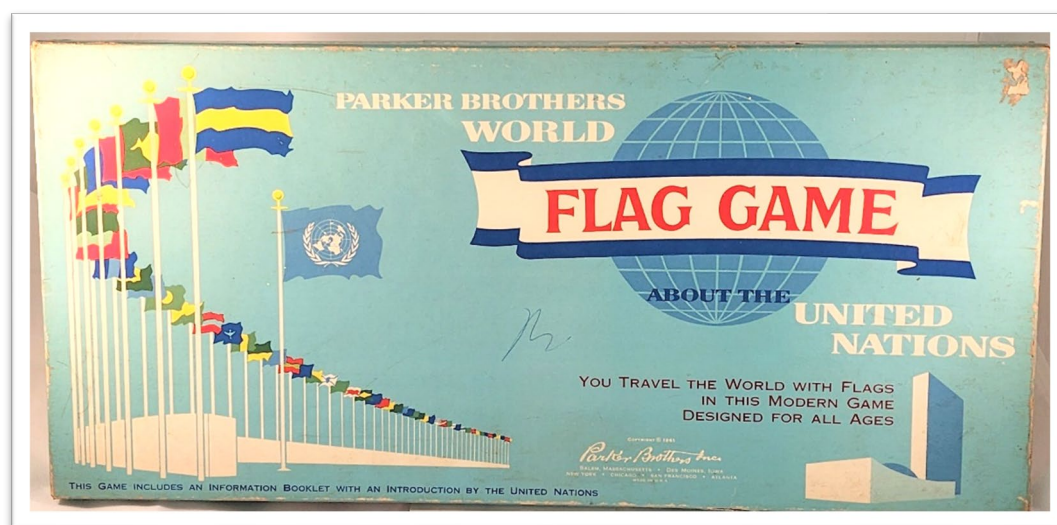


Figure 11: The Game of Flags

UN HEADQUARTERS: CAPITAL OF THE WORLD

The task of designing the UN Headquarters fell to a team of architects drawn from around the globe, who were given a specific brief: to come together in a 'Workshop for Peace' to create a building that would be, as the UN itself puts it, 'a gem of "International Style" imbued with meaning and purpose.'

The UN, on its website, defines the building thus:

The compound embodies the essence of the Organization and its ideals are expressed in the buildings: the glass facades allow the public to look into the building, representing transparency; the internal balconies from the public areas overlook the second floor, reminding for delegates that the UN is accountable to the people of the world. United Nations Headquarters was built to be home for all nations, with no decorations or dominant colours, and with public access in mind.

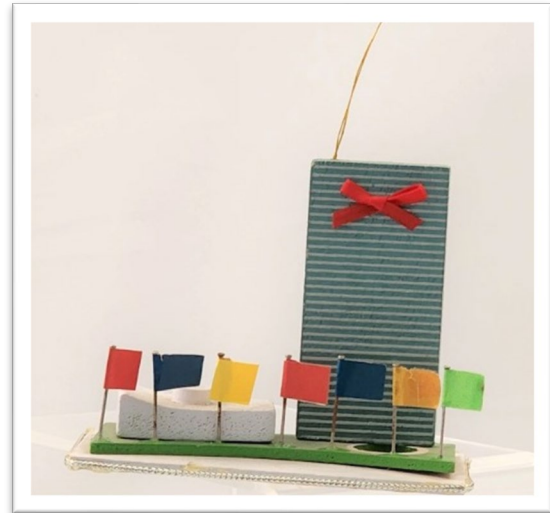


Figure 12: A vintage wooden Christmas ornament of the UN Building in New York

The striking architecture of the complex is readily recognisable in souvenirs and memorabilia, like the Christmas ornament and Lego set.

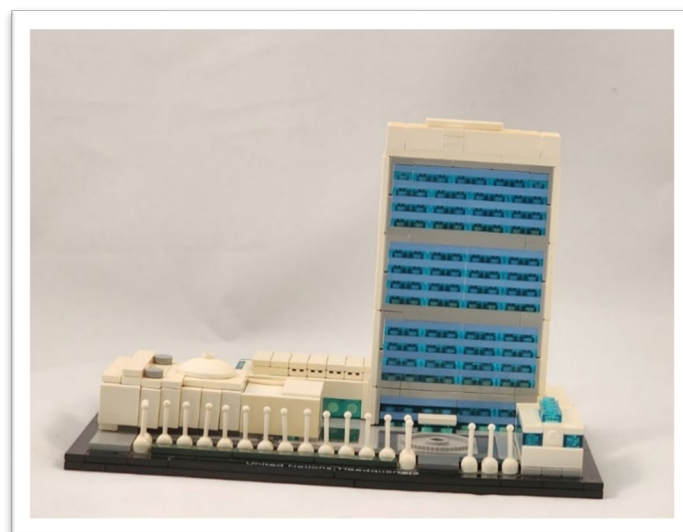


Figure 13: A LEGO model of UN Headquarters

SELLING THE UNITED NATIONS

In much of the early publicity regarding the United Nations, the focus was on the building itself as a 'capital of the world' – a dynamic and vibrant hub where cultures intersect and where the most pressing questions facing the world would be resolved. The UN was positioned as a cosmopolitan place of power and awe, where world leaders and great thinkers would meet and interact. The UN itself leant into this narrative, with official publications hailing the UN building as a place of 'majestic grandeur'.

Advertising at the time drew heavily on this narrative – companies that provided services to the UN emphasised the importance of what both they and the UN were doing, and other companies, like Rolex and JB Scotch (see below) played up the sophistication and significance of their products, aligning themselves with the UN and invoking the notion of the place as a centre of power and influence.

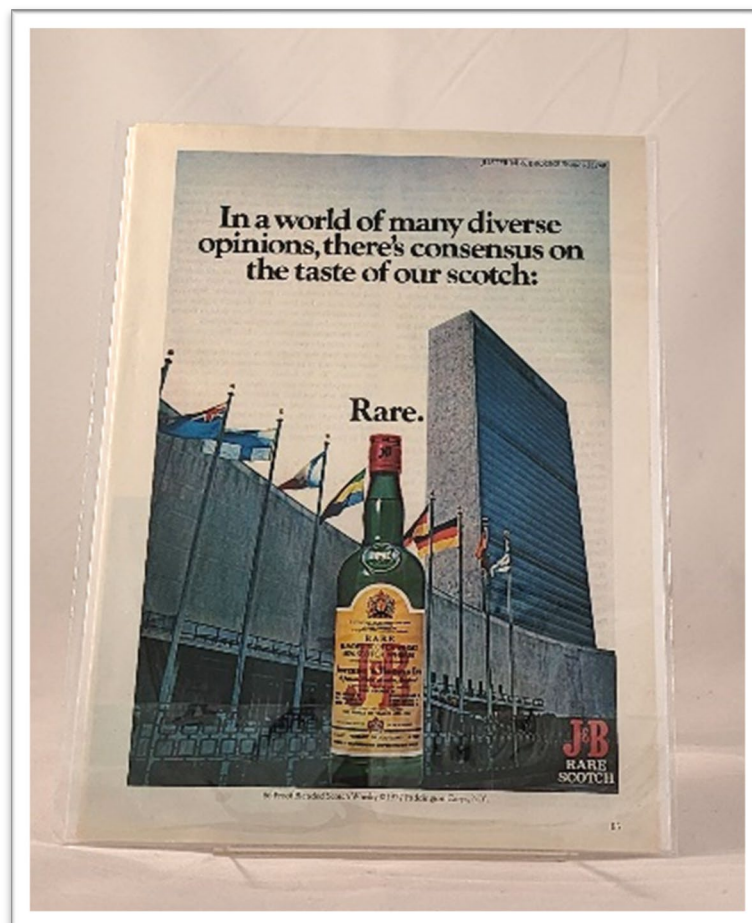


Figure 14: A JB Scotch ad – circa 1980s



Figure 15: A Rolex ad – circa 1960s

EXIT THROUGH THE GIFT SHOP

Much like the ads that portrayed the UN as a vibrant centre of the world, works that predicted or called for an international governing body frequently idealised such an institution as capable of saving the world from all ills.

I.O. Evans' *The World of To-Morrow*, published in the 1930s, hypothesised that a 'World League of Peace' could solve the problems of rampant consumerism, and that reform of international capital markets could solve poverty and hunger, and end war:

Each nation is producing much more than its people can buy [and] ... because of this rivalry for diminishing markets and not because of national hatreds ... there is danger of war. The plain remedy is to alter our money system... in this way, money reform would not merely banish poverty and hunger, overcome disease, abolish crime, and encourage art and science and sport, it would also free us from the danger of war ... it would usher in an age of plenty, leisure, and peace.

This call to reject consumerism is at stark odds with the quotidian mass-produced UN souvenirs you can buy, like keychains, stress balls, and commemorative plates.



Figure 16: A UN commemorative plate



Figure 17: A UN 'stress' ball



Figure 18: A 'Hello Kitty' branded keychain – sold to raise money for the Sustainable Development Goals

TOYING WITH INTERNATIONAL LAW



Figure 19: A plush teddy bear for UNICEF

For a field that deals with some of the most serious issues in world affairs, international law souvenirs, merchandise, and memorabilia frequently engage with the whimsical and child-like, most obviously in merchandise aimed at raising money for UNICEF - the United Nations Fund for Children. Children's toys and games such as Barbies, teddy bears, Rubik's cubes, dress-ups, aim to raise money for UN works, while encouraging children to engage with the work of the UN.

Some of these items make obvious connections between the UN and children - the teddy bear and the Miffy toy, for example.



Figure 20: A Miffy toy, for UNICEF

Others call to the adult collector, like the Eleanor Roosevelt Barbie, created to honour her involvement in the drafting and adoption of the UN Declaration of Human Rights.



Figure 21: Eleanor Roosevelt Barbie Doll - from the brand's Inspiring Women line



Figure 22: The SDG Rubik's Cube

Other items sit at a more complex intersection – the Rubik's cube for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) is striking in that it places the complex issues at the heart of the SDG on a toy that is notoriously difficult to solve – perhaps an unintended ironic commentary on the SDG themselves.

Likewise, the toy Peacekeeper's helmet sits in tension with the historic failures of UN peacekeepers to protect the vulnerable.

Figure 23: A UN Peacekeeper's helmet - for children's dress-up and pretend play



WORD BALLOONS & PULP FICTION

The United Nations is now so entrenched in pop culture that it's become a shorthand for the centre of world politics.

In moving to this place of centrality, the *idea* of the United Nations, and what it can do and achieve, has become larger than life, and often frequently does not reflect what the United Nations actually does.

Nowhere is this better seen than in the depiction of the United Nations in futurist literature and comic books. Comics like *UN Force* present a fantastical picture of superheroes entrusted with helping the UN carry out its mandate for securing international peace and security.

Other comics see the UN as capable of restraining the most powerful superbeings - as in the comic where Batman puts Superman on trial in the General Assembly.



Figure 24: A UN Force comic



Figure 25: A comic depicting Superman and Batman at the UN



Figure 26: UN Marzipan Candy Delegates



Figure 27: UN Paperweight



Figure 28: UN Swatch Watch



Figure 29: UN Viewfinder



Figure 30: Louis Vuitton Teddy Bear for UNICEF



Figure 31: UN shot glass

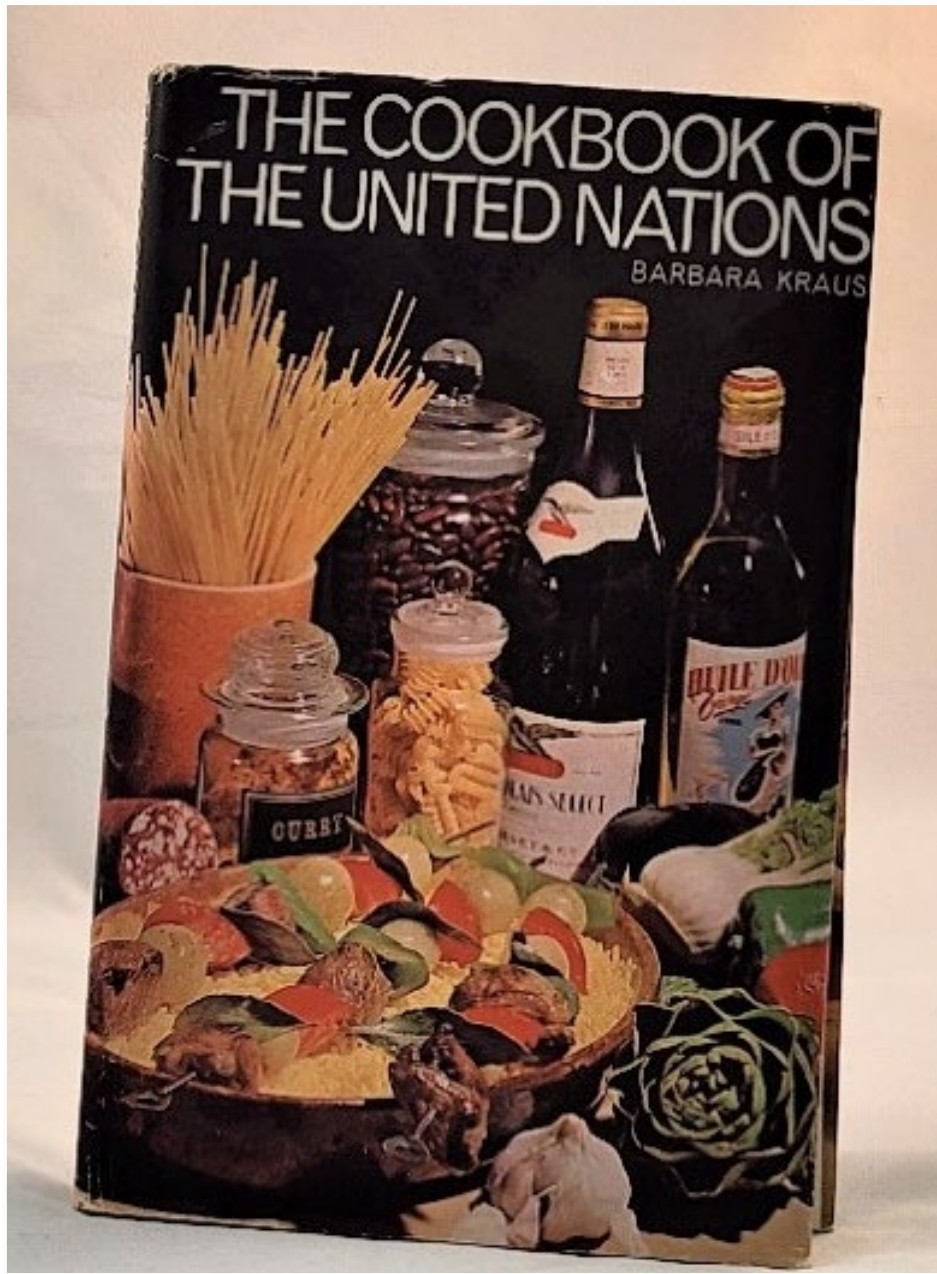


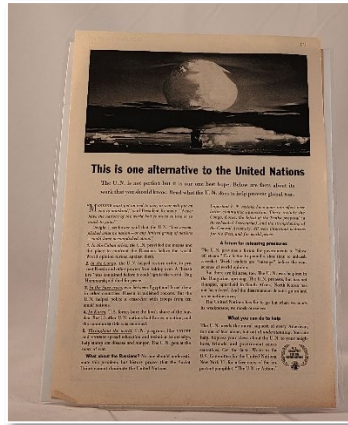
Figure 32: UN Cookbook



Figure 33: UN paper dolls



Figure 34: UN teaspoon



Figures 35-37: Ads for Westinghouse, the US Committee for the UN, and the UN Tour Guides



Figure 38: UN Game of Flags card game



Figure 39: UN felt pennant

EXHIBIT LIST: AT THE VANISHING POINT

Wellington, New Zealand, 29 June 2023

and

Fisher Library, Sydney Australia, August - November 2023

** Wellington and Sydney exhibitions*

*** Sydney exhibition only*

**** Wellington exhibition only*

BARBIE ELEANOR ROOSEVELT *

BARBIE FOR UNICEF *

BATMAN AND SUPERMAN AT THE UN COMIC *

HELLO KITTY SDF KEYRING *

HERMES UN SCARF ***

JUSTICE LEAGUE OF AMERICA COMIC *

LOUIS VUITTON TEDDY BEAR FOR UNICEF ***

MIFFY FOR UNICEF *

PAX-O-SCOPE **

PEACE DOVE **

PEACE PALACE SCARF **

SDF RUBIK'S CUBE *

UN BOARD GAME - ARTICLE 27 *

UN BOARD GAME - GAME OF FLAGS *

UN BOARD GAME - WORLD DOMINATION *

UN BUILDING CHRISTMAS DECORATION *

UN BUILDING IN LEGO *

UN BUILDING PAPERWEIGHT *

UN CANDY DELEGATES ***

UN CARD GAME - GAME OF FLAGS *

UN COOKBOOK ***
UN FORCE COMIC *
UN JB SCOTCH AD *
UN MUSHROOM CLOUD AD *
UN PAPER DOLLS ***
UN PEACEKEEPERS HELMET FOR KIDS *
UN PENNANT *
UN ROLEX AD *
UN SALT AND PEPPER SHAKERS ***
UN SHOT GLASS ***
UN SQUEEZE BALL 'PEACE' *
UN SWATCH WATCH ***
UN TEASPOON **
UN TOUR GUIDES AD *
UN VIEWMASTER **
UN WESTINGHOUSE AD *
UN WORKER FIGURINE ***
UNEF PLATE **
UNICEF PLATE **
UNICEF SUPERMAN AND WONDER WOMAN *
UNICEF TEDDY BEAR *



Figure 40: UN Justice League comic