

Student creates painting depicting elements of first-year legal study

Last year, Georgia Law was presented with a painting created by then-first-year student W. Elliott Stiles. The artwork reflects and draws upon relevant case law, theories, ideas and history examined in the first semester of legal study at the law school. Stiles titled the piece “The Common Law” since the legal education provided at Georgia Law is “premised on case study and acknowledges and honors the significance of U.S. Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr.’s Lowell Lectures.”

The painting hangs near the main entrance of the Alexander Campbell King Law Library. Here is an explanation of the work from the artist’s perspective.

Criminal Law

- The faint beer bottle in the central character’s head draws upon *Proctor v. State* symbolizing the concept of thought crimes.
- The two women with joined hands are holding a purple tulip (see torts) against the central character’s neck draws upon concepts of conspiracy, murder and attempt.

Property

- The feather in the woman’s hair (left) represents *Johnson v. M’Intosh* and the concepts of right to title and right to occupancy.
- In the central character’s left hand, he bears a fox and a timepiece on his wrist. These elements are reflective of *Pierson v. Post*, the rule of capture, possession and the concept of first in time.
- In the central character’s other hand, he holds a twig that draws upon the ceremonial practices of feudal England in the passing of seisin in land conveyances.

Civil Procedure

- The man in the background is the legendary Rex Grossman who is serving process by the most effective method, in person.
- The elongated arms of the woman (right) are symbolic of the long-arm statutes provided in state laws.

Contracts

- The woman (left) is presenting a salt shaker in her right hand that symbolizes *Droughty v. Salt* and the concept of the donative gift promise.



“The Common Law” incorporates several elements from the first year of legal study at Georgia Law.

- The lines running between the two characters in the background are symbolic of the formation of a contract in the meeting of the minds.

Torts

- The purple tulip is pulled from the old English case of *Byrd v. Holbrook* and symbolizes the spring gun used by the gardener to protect his flowers. Here, it is held against the central character and raises the concern of doing with an instrument or device that which one is not permitted to do in person. The joined hands around the tulip further represent *Summers v. Tice* and the concept of joint tortfeasors.
- The life preserver bearing the name Grayton symbolizes the *Grimstad* case and the irony embodied in the court’s but-for test, a test that takes the court’s attention away from the true facts and forces the court to imagine a hypothetical situation in reaching a verdict.

- The four dots on the eye of the woman (right) represent foresight, and the eye in the bun of her hair represents hindsight. This relates to *Eckert v. Long Island R.R.* and Terry’s flawed theory on negligence in using hindsight to determine foresight.
- The cracker in the jaw of the woman (left) draws upon common law legend that the king had the Chancellor of Writs pass out crackers to those subjects complaining about the insufficient writs of trespass in order to quiet the crowd, thus creating the Ritz cracker.
- The X’s on the central character are reflective of the battle wounds first in the stomach, then the chest, and then in the neck sustained by Justice Holmes in his service to our country during the Civil War.
- The large hand of the central character bears on each finger “learn,” which is a tribute to Justice Learned Hand.

General Elements

- The trees in the background are the same trees visible through the large pane glass of the law library, the constant companion of those who spend long days devoted to their studies.



W. Elliott Stiles