

Top Atty At Army Center Of Military History Joins Shook Hardy

By Jack Rodgers

Law360 (July 11, 2024, 4:35 PM EDT) -- The former chief counsel for the U.S. Army Center of Military History has joined Shook Hardy & Bacon LLP as co-chair of the firm's growing art law practice, the firm announced Thursday.

Channah Norman was most recently responsible for providing strategic advice and legal counsel for the National Museum of the U.S. Army and its 46 subsidiary Army museums. Norman's other responsibilities in her previous role included counseling the Army Artifact Collection on a myriad of art law-related issues — like advising national institutions on sensitive repatriation and restitution matters, the firm said.



Channah Norman

Norman advised those institutions on issues around Nazi propaganda art and with implementation of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, among other sensitive repatriation and restitution matters, the firm said. Norman also led a team in drafting a collections management plan, outlining policies and procedures for all aspects of museum operations, in her previous role.

Norman currently serves as a faculty member with George Washington University's museum studies master's degree program. She'll also work as a Shook Hardy senior counsel, the firm said.

Norman will lead the firm's art law practice alongside Alicia Donahue, a member of Shook Hardy's executive committee, and Tristan Duncan, who co-chairs the firm's class action and appellate litigation group. Norman will split her time between Shook Hardy's Washington, D.C., and New York offices.

Shook Hardy's art law practice provides legal counsel to museums, dealers, collectors, financial institutions, insurers and other clients on repatriation and restitution issues. The practice will advise clients on copyright statuses, infringement claims and authenticity disputes, but also will work with clients on sales agreements, contracts and insurance coverage for fine art.

In an interview with Law360 Pulse on Thursday, Norman said that about two years ago she was presenting on a restitution and repatriation panel when attorneys from Shook Hardy who had seen her speak approached her about joining the firm. Those conversations led to her current role.

"It's my passion; it's the area of law I've always wanted to practice day in and day out," Norman said. "It was a nice switch to take the museum law experience and put it into private practice."

Duncan told Law360 Pulse on Thursday that Shook Hardy has been involved with various art litigation over the years, and that there had been some overlap between the work done by the class action and appellate litigation team and that of attorneys in art law.

Duncan, who also serves on the business council for Kansas City's Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, said that many Shook Hardy attorneys have similar art-adjacent roles, serving on panels and working with art institutions, and that their clients work with a range of issues related to art.

"What we have been told by these various contacts over the years, [is] that the art world was actually seeing more litigation and was needing more-seasoned litigators," she said. "It's a very fascinating and collegial world, and so they need counsel who also appreciates those relationships and will maintain that amicable approach to trying to resolve a dispute, but if that dispute breaks down, then they want litigators who can win in the courtroom as well as the court of public opinion."

Norman spent about 8½ years in her previous role and, before joining the Army museum in 2016, was an appellate litigator with the U.S. Department of Justice, according to her LinkedIn profile.

She was at the Justice Department for more than seven years, according to her LinkedIn profile, and she also performed a detail to INTERPOL's Cultural Property Crimes Program, the firm said.

Norman said acting as general counsel for the Army museums brought her into contact with interesting art repatriation and restitution issues, which was work she is looking forward to expanding in her new role in private practice.

"The one that I was talking about at the conference ... was some Catholic church bells that U.S. soldiers took from the Philippines in the early 1900s," Norman said. "So the question arose: Can and should the Army return those bells to the Philippines?"

She added: "And so it was a really interesting, deep dive for me to look at the law of whether or not the taking in the first place was legal; even if it was, what would be the legal course to returning them; what were the ethical questions about keeping them versus returning them. And that's reflective of the types of questions that arise in all different kinds of restitution and repatriation cases in all different areas."

Norman earned her law degree from the University of New Mexico School of Law and holds bachelor's degrees in art history and French from Cornell University, the firm said.

Norman also has a master's degree in art business from Sotheby's Institute of Art in London and a Master of Laws degree in art and cultural property from Georgetown University Law Center.

Norman said that part of what makes the practice exciting to her personally is taking art law-specific questions related to museums and extrapolating them through the lens of private practice.

"For example, the sale and transfer of art, not as much [of an issue] where I was," Norman said. "I did see a lot of that, but there will be art market transactions that were not part of the Army Museum complex where I was working. Same thing with some of the [artificial intelligence] issues popping up in copyright."

She said she'd always wanted to explore issues related art law, and working in the industry is what drove her decision to go to law school.

"My background is art history and French, and so I have a long love of the art world," Norman said. "I was at the Sotheby's Institute getting a master's degree in art business, and part of that involved art law, and that just blew my hair back, and I thought, 'Oh my gosh, wait, so I could engage in all of these interesting issues as an attorney?' And it's taken a while to land where I am, but I do think all of the experience leading to now, has me well prepared for it."

--Editing by Linda Voorhis.

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