

**Polina Barskova (Berkeley)**

**Postcards from the Siege of Leningrad: Ekphrasis, Propaganda, and the Production of Ambiguity**

How can a city/image be turned into a propaganda act? Postcards produced at the darkest hour of the Siege of Leningrad (1941–44) display a striking variety of strategies for representing the besieged city as heroic, unbroken, and worthy of vengeance. These small “media vessels” ask spectators to defend Leningrad and marvel at its might and courage. My paper focuses on cases where text and image on the cards collaborate in less predictable ways, creating semantic loopholes that complicate straightforward propaganda reading. By analyzing such ambiguous couplings, I ask what other messages—beyond official patriotic ones—were transmitted from suffering Leningrad to the “Big Land” in 1943 and what they communicate to viewers today. The postcards emerge as a site where trauma, mourning, and everyday experience seep through the imposed rhetoric of wartime heroism, producing a layered visual-poetic archive of the siege.