Blavatnik Archive announces NEH grant for "Postcards from the Siege"

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The Blavatnik Archive is thrilled to announce that we have been awarded a National Endowment for the Humanities “Digital Projects for the Public” grant to create a digital exploration platform prototype for our collection of postcards published and mailed during the Siege of Leningrad in World War II. This project, “Postcards from the Siege: Messages from the Besieged City of Leningrad,” will offer an intimate, in-depth look at the cultural production during the siege and the lived human experience of a humanitarian disaster that took nearly a million civilian lives (about a third of the city’s prewar population).

Despite the catastrophic conditions—bombings, starvation, cold, disease, and darkness—within the besieged city, as many as 800 striking postcard designs were produced and distributed to Leningrad’s residents between September 1941 and January 1944. Much like other wartime media, these postcards underwent a strict censorship process to ensure they delivered ideologically correct messages. And yet, we find a staggering variety of styles representing the work of dozens of artists, poets, and even composers—some famous, others all but forgotten. These postcards were mailed by (and to) the besieged by the thousands, maintaining a tenuous but determined human connection. In this project, we will look at them as objects of politics and propaganda, as works of art and historical artifacts, and as a means of communication and testimony.

Our platform will offer several ways of learning about the Siege and the Siege postcards. Some sections will include essays focusing on specific themes, artists, and events. These narratives will cover topics like the history of the Siege of Leningrad, Soviet propaganda strategies, the workings of the state censorship apparatus, styles of Soviet art, biographies of contributing artists, and the ways that Leningraders inscribed their individual voices and experience into their correspondence. The narrative texts will be supplemented by archival video and photographs, newspaper clippings, and other historical materials. Other sections will highlight individual postcards and examine the stories of their production, the symbolism of their imagery, and the messages they carried.

We are fortunate to be collaborating with a number of leading scholars in the fields of Soviet history, literature, and culture; art history; media studies; and musicology,
including:

Polina Barskova  –  Lead Project Scholar
Associate Professor of Russian History, University of California, Berkeley

Richard Bidlack
Martin and Brooke Stein Professor of History, Washington and Lee University

Anna Nisnevich
Visiting Scholar; Lecturer, McIntire Department of Music, University of Virginia

Martin Kreiswirth
Professor of English, Emeritus, McGill University

Stephen M. Norris
Walter E. Havighurst Professor of Russian History; Director, Havighurst Center for Russian and Post-Soviet Studies, Miami University, Ohio

Alla Rosenfeld
Research Consultant for Russian and East European Art, The Merrill C. Berman Collection of Early 20th-Century Avant-Garde Art and Design

Alison Rowley
Professor of History, Concordia University, Montreal

Amber Nickell
Assistant Professor of History, Fort Hays State University

Julie Chervinsky
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Click [here](#) to learn more about the project, and for additional information contact Julie Chervinsky at [info@blavatnikarchive.org](mailto:info@blavatnikarchive.org).