

Title: A Colorful View From Above: Defamiliarizing the Spectacle of the Siege
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Artist L.A. Ronchevskaia recalled that, while on night watch of the rooftops of Leningrad in the summer of 1941, the city appeared, "in a new light. Nobody before has seen it like this. We've seen a pink sea of the rooftops, the far side of the Baltic sea, the sky thick with dirigibles." ("Diary", *Khudozhniki Goroda-Fronta*, Leningrad: Khudozhnik RSFSR, 1973, 290).

This pronouncement becomes a prominent trope in the Siege accounts; the "new beauty" of the besieged city is registered in numerous poignant and fascinating details. In my paper, I will discuss three pervasive topoi of the Siege reality as registered through the prism of artistic visions: the Badaev warehouse fires of September 1941, the view of the city from above, and the attempts to describe and express visually the colors of the besieged city. As material, I will draw on both visual sources and written accounts (diaries, memoirs, fiction) by witnesses of the Siege.

The following questions direct my inquiry: what are the functions and mechanisms, both psychological and discursive, of the aestheticization of the Siege experience? Where does the defamiliarizing device of the discovery of the city's "new beauty" originate? (One might assume that beyond revisiting Shklovsky's theorizing of urban experience of the Sieges – both in the *Khod Konem* and *Tetiva* anthologies – an interesting perspective might be identified in Aleksandr Benois's writing on the rediscovery of Petersburg beauty in his articles in *Mir Iskusstva* (1902).) What is the discursive connection between the sensation of a city endangered and its citizens' ability to experience their city in new, creatively productive terms? How does the notion of the Petersburg text as defined by V. N. Toporov and Yu. M. Lotman serve this mutual dependence of eschatological and defamiliarizing gazes?