

Splendor and Opulence: Catherine the Great, the Hermitage and the History of St. Petersburg

Tuesday, October 20 to December 8 2020 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon

ZOOM Session

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Coordinator and Presenter Julia Zarankin. Dr. Julia Zarankin holds a PhD in Comparative Literature from Princeton University. She is fascinated by all things Russian and was a featured guest on the Michael Enright's Sunday Edition on CBC. She was Recently awarded an Excellence in Teaching Award from the University of Toronto School of Continuing Studies and enjoys teaching lifelong learners in venues across the GTA. Julia also leads tours to Russia and the Caucasus with Worldwide Quest. Julia Zarankin is the author of the recently published *Field Notes from an Unintentional Birder*.

Course Outline. A symbol, a monument to splendor and opulence, a museum, an imperial residence, Russia's Hermitage is more than just a building. In fact, the history of the Winter Palace/Hermitage tracks St. Petersburg's development from a swampy backwater to a dazzling imperial capital. We'll begin with Peter the Great's decision to establish a new imperial capital in St. Petersburg. From there, we'll see how Catherine the Great, a self-proclaimed art and architecture addict, transforms St. Petersburg into a cultural capital. Then we'll examine how every subsequent tsar fashions the Hermitage to suit his particular political agenda and finally we'll come to see how the museum bears witness to Russia's tumultuous history.

October 20: The Birth of St. Petersburg

Peter the Great's decision to move the Russian Imperial capital from Moscow to St. Petersburg revolutionizes Russia and ushers it into the modern age.

October 27: Addicted to Art: Catherine and her Hermitage

We'll discuss Catherine's ascent to power and the beginnings of her expansive art collection.

November 3: Catherine's Building Frenzy

Catherine the Great builds upon Peter's project of westernizing Russia and embarks on a series of opulent building projects, among them the creation of her Hermitage.

November 10: Imperial Splendor

Alexander I's victory over Napoleon established Russia as one of the leading powers of Europe. We'll see how the art collection of the Hermitage announces a new Age.

November 17: A Public Museum!

After a great fire in 1837, Nicholas 1 reconstructs the Winter Palace and Hermitage to conform to his reactionary political agenda. The Hermitage gains a new building and is transformed into a public museum in 1852.

November 24 Great Reforms, Nationalism, and the Hermitage

The 1860s marks an important point of transition in Russian cultural life: no longer copying Europe, Russian art, literature, and music experience a renaissance of sorts.

December 1: Revolution and the Hermitage

We'll see how St. Petersburg's revolutionary climate; extensive political and economic upheaval affect the Hermitage in the early 20th century.

December 8: The Hermitage and the Tumultuous 20th Century

We'll discuss Stalin's catastrophic decision to sell off Hermitage treasures to finance industrialization and we'll conclude with a discussion of the Hermitage today and the direction it's taking.

Researcher/Committee Contact and Chair Loretta Fines

Additional Reading Recommendations:

W. Bruce Lincoln, *Between Heaven and Hell: The Story of a Thousand Years of Artistic Life in Russia*

Eva Stachniak, *The Winter Palace*

Orlando Figes, *Natasha's Dance*

Mikhail Piotrovsky, *My Hermitage: How the Hermitage survived Tsars, Wars, and Revolutions*

Here is the TPL link for Julia's talk at Toronto Public Library about her new book:

<https://www.crowdcast.io/e/tplunintentionalbirder>

Here is the link to Julia's appearance at the (virtual) Wild Writers Festival in Waterloo:

<https://wildwriters.ca/product/finding-your-natural-voice/>