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Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern, "Babylonian Tower," 2012.
[Acrylic on canvas, 48 x 36]
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"Imperial/Tsarist Space of Power in Russia, 1990s – 2010s"

December 5, 2017 at 6:00 PM
701 S. Morgan - Institute for the Humanities
Lower Level - Stevenson Hall

This talk considers the situation that is rarely addressed in studies of political and historical memory. Rather than focusing on the process of the "invention of tradition" (Eric Hobsbawm, Terrance Ranger) and the designation of "sites of memory" (Pierre Nora) in post-Soviet Russia it explores what happens afterwards, when politicians and general public begin inhabiting the newly created spaces of important historical symbolism and fall under the influence of their recently created narratives. More specifically the talk's focus is on ceremonial spaces related to tsars and emperors in Moscow and St. Petersburg: the Faceted Chamber of the Moscow Kremlin, St. Andrew Hall in the Great Kremlin Palace (Moscow), St. George Hall of the Winter Palace (The Hermitage in St. Petersburg), etc. Russian presidents Boris Yeltsin, Vladimir Putin and Dmitry Medvedev felt it necessary to fashion their own ceremonial quarters in former imperial palaces by using and adapting the symbolism of space representation of past authority – even though those historical precedents themselves were the products of very recent architectural restorations. Once reconstructed, Russia's historical memory of political grandeur has appealed in different ways to the main centers of power. While the government (president) feels more comfortable with symbolism of imperial period, the Russian Orthodox Church (the Moscow Patriarchate) has claimed the representations of pre-Petrine Moscow Tsardom. Thus, the "invented traditions" acquire agency of their own.

Ekaterina Boltunova is Associate Professor at the Faculty of Humanities, National Research University Higher School of Economics, Moscow. She is currently a visiting scholar at UIC (on the Prokhorov foundation fellowship). Professor Boltunova was a 2008-2009 Fulbright Scholar at Columbia University, NY; Visiting Lecturer at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign (2009) and Indiana University (2017), and a participant of multiple international research projects. Her research interests include cultural and political history of the Russian empire and the USSR; topography and semiotics of power in Russia and Poland; imperial discourse of war; historical memory; and Soviet and post-Soviet reception of the imperial space. She is the author of *Peter the Great's Guard as a Military Corporation* (Moscow, 2011, in Russian); "Reception of Imperial and Tsarist Spheres of Authority in Russia, 1990s-2010s," *Ab Imperio* 2 (2016): 261-309; "Russian Officer Corps and Military Efficiency: 1800-1914," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 16, no. 2 (2015): 413-422; "Imperial Throne Halls and Discourse of Power in the Topography of Early Modern Russia (late 17th – 18th centuries)," in *The Emperor's House: Palaces from Augustus to the Age of Absolutism* (Berlin : De Gruyter, 2015), 341-352 and many other publications.

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