**Betty Aaerens [I] active *c.*1903–07**

This female sculptor showed two marble pieces at the annual autumn exhibition of the Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool in 1903; a high-relief titled ‘Ave Maria’ and a bust of ‘Mme Bianchi’. She then showed work at the Royal Academy in 1904, 1905, and 1907 from 46 Quarrendon Street, Parson's Green, London: this was also the address of the sculptor and medallist Margaret Winser (*sic*), who moved to Ratsberry, Tenterden, Kent, in 1909 and died there in 1944. It is not yet known if Quarrendon Street was generally an artists’ house or there was some other friendship or family connection between them.

**Betty Aaerens [II] (Rebecca Aarons/Scheizer/Schiezer/Shreizer or Kent, later Betty Taub), 1904–1994**

This sculptor was born and registered as Rebecca Scheizer in Mile End (Stepney), London, on 8 October 1904, and was eldest child of Abraham Aarons, a Russian Jewish ‘Ladies-Taylor Cutter’ and his Russian-Polish wife, Mary. She had two younger sisters and a brother who was six months old at the 1911 census, when all are listed as Aarons and their address was 59 Oxford Street, Stepney.

It is likely that Mary’s maiden name was Scheizer (or Schiezer) and a possible explanation for this as Rebecca’s birth-name may be that her parents only subsequently married. As ‘Schreizer’ it was also the name under which she entered the Manchester Jews School on 15 June 1914 and from an address at 119 Elizabeth Street (Hightown) there, presumably as consequence of a work-related move by their father. Her siblings Rachel (b. 1 August 1908), Jane (b. 20 November 1909) and Morris (b. 27 October 1910) also joined as ‘Shreizers’ on the same day. The first two left on 1 August 1915 and 1917, respectively, both being noted as ‘Drafted’, which presumably means to another school: Morris appears to have been withdrawn on 18 January 1915 when still under five. Why the whole family was then using ‘Schreizer’ is unknown, unless perhaps to avoid being traced to Manchester.

Rebecca next appears as the ‘Betty Aaerens’ who in October and November 1932 exhibited two pieces, ‘Tanya’ (no. 226) and ‘Portrait of a Youth’ (no. 235) at the Lancashire and Cheshire Artists’ Exhibition at the Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool. In 1934, at the 75th Spring Exhibition of the Manchester Academy of Fine Arts, she showed ‘Noel’ (no. 265) a head and shoulders bust of a young man. This was probably in plaster since the Manchester City Art Gallery holds four letters by her dated 1 March – 23 April 1934, all signed ‘Betty Aaerens’ and from 119 Elizabeth Street, relating to its casting in bronze and acquisition by the Gallery for the sum of £35. Correspondence with the sitter’s wife, also held by the Gallery, suggests that she shortly afterwards left Manchester for London where she later married.

The 1939 electoral register for Hackney shows a ‘Betty Aarens’ (*sic*) living at 10 Laura Place but the September 1939 National Register for the same address calls her ‘Betty Kent’: this may have been the name under which she then worked as a ‘Commercial Artist’, which was the occupation she then stated. A subsequent amendment shows her married name was Taub and she had in fact already been noted (as ‘Aarons’) living with Henry Taub at 46, Colverstone Crescent, Hackney, in its electoral register for 1938. After they married there in December 1939, her maiden name was given under his entry in the register index as Rebecca ‘Scheizer or Kent’, and under hers as just ‘Scheizer’.

While she continued to work both graphically and as a sculptor, subsequent traces are slight. In 1951, she was probably the Betty Taub who exhibited a painting or drawing entitled ‘Spring at Kew’ at the Ben Uri Gallery in Portman Street, London, in the ‘Annual Exhibition of Paintings, Drawings and Sculptures by Contemporary Jewish Artists’. The exhibitions listings of the *Hayes and Harlington Gazette* of Wednesday 6 September 1989, also mention ‘Small sculptures by Betty Taub’ at ‘the Cow Byre, annex to Ruislip Library until Sep. 16.’

Betty Taub died at 13, Harrold House, Finchley Road, London, on 30 October 1994. The death-index note that she was born on 4 October 1904 is probably an error given that both her Manchester school record and the 1939 Register give the 8th. Why she adopted the ‘Aaerens’ spelling of her father’s surname is unknown but, as with ‘Kent’, it appears to have been a professional usage.

‘Noel’, the handsome sitter for the Manchester bust was Ernest Noel Barker (b. 8 October 1902). He too appears to have been from the Manchester Jewish community, which is probably how Aaerens knew him, and in September 1939 was a Customs timber inspector living at 116, Burton Road, Manchester, with his Syrian-born wife Esther (née Shammah, m. Manchester, 1936), her mother Nazlie Shammah (née Gubbay), and several siblings. He died aged 87 on the 27 July 1990, at 20, Sandhurst Avenue, Withington, Manchester. The Barkers had two children, Toni (b. 1937) and Victor (b. 1939).

*Summarised from Art UK discussion on the identity of Aaerens as sculptor of the ‘Noel’ bust, April 2021*

PvdM 20. 4. 21