**(Vera) Elizaveta Petrovna Cheremisinova, 1877–1963 [Draft 4]**

Elisabeth Tcheremissinof, as she was more internationally known, was a Russian sculptor, medallist and painter, though this was a redirection after first being a skilled artist in decorative leatherwork, including book-bindings. Of aristocratic paternal descent back to the 17th century, she was born in St Petersburg and in the 1939 UK Register gave her birth date as 9 November 1879, though this has been corrected to 9 February by another hand. The year also appears elsewhere as 1874 but it is more likely that she was born on 9 February 1877: her Russian Orthodox baptism is recorded in the church of the Peterhof Palace on 13 March of that year. Given the likely proximity of her birth and baptism, it is possible she was in fact born in a family house in Peterhof – 20 km outside the city– and she completed her early education at the Smolny Institute for Noble Maidens, the leading St Petersburg school for aristocratic girls, in 1895 (when she would have been 18, rather than 21 if born in 1874).

Elisabeth was the youngest of the four sons and three daughters of Pyotr Nikolai Cheremisinov (1838–*c.*1917) a St Petersburg jurist and Privy Councillor to Tsar Nicholas II, and highly regarded head of international communications on the Russian railways. His other children generally seem to have been born (from 1866 on) at 25, Konyushennaya Street in central St Peterburg between the Nevsky Prospekt and Konyushennaya Square, and this remained the principal family home until at least 1917. Elisabeth’s mother, Anna Vasilievna Trewheller (variably Truveller/Trewheeler or Trewhella/ar, 1842–1908), was Pyotr’s first wife. Her father was a civil engineer of Cornish background who trained in Russia, settled in St Petersburg from 1833 and was eventually known there as Vasily Ivanovich Truveller (John being his wheelwright father’s first name). Born at Gillingham, Kent, on 24 June 1808, he was baptised Frederick William there on 17 July, but later reversed the order to William Frederick. He too worked on the Russian railways and other utilities and is credited in the edited memoir of his granddaughter Martha von Rosen (daughter of Elisabeth’s immediately elder sister Anna) with the design of ‘some of the beautiful buildings and fountains’ in the town of Peterhof, where he enjoyed Imperial favour to do so. The most notable is a house he built for himself, still called ‘Truveller’s House’ (and now partly a hotel) at 46 St Petersburg Avenue. He died aged 51 in 1859.

After leaving school Elisabeth had opportunity to travel and, among other places, visited Egypt, Jerusalem, Italy, France and Switzerland. Her early work in leather is first evident in the winter of 1903/04, when examples were exhibited at the Österreichischen Museum für Kunst und Industrie in Vienna and she was praised in the museum’s magazine for July 1904 as a ‘strong, well-educated talent’. Eight leather items by her, mainly decorated bindings, were also shown at the St Louis Universal Exhibition of 1904 (marking the centenary of the Louisiana Purchase), the ninth being photographs of her leather binding of a volume of Heine’s poetry, purchased earlier in the year in St Petersburg by the Empress Maria Theodorovna of Russia (1847–1928).

By 1905/6, however, she had turned to sculpture and before 1911 had studied for three years in Vienna and two in Paris, though the sequence is confusing. Leonard Forrer’s *Biographical Dictionary of Medallists* (1916: vol. 6, p. 44) names her as ‘Vera Elizabeth’ and her teachers as ‘Strasser, Gauquié, and Roland’ – that is, Arthur Strasser (1854–1927), Henri Désiré Gauquié (1858–1927) and perhaps Roland Mathieu-Meusnier (1824–1896). The first was born in what is now Slovenia and worked mainly in Vienna. The second was French, working in Paris, but being taught by Mathieu-Meusnier, also French, would imply she was either there before 1896 or that he had taught elsewhere, so ‘Roland’ may be someone else. An Italian-printed Russian book *Nikolai and Alexandra: court of the last Russian emperors, 1890–1917* (Slavia-Interbook, 1994) includes a short entry on Cheremisinova, saying she ‘Completed a full course of study in the workshop of Professor Strasse [*sic*] in Vienna, then worked at the Académie Colarossi in Paris’. She exhibited three sculptural works at the 1909 Paris Salon, sent in from 4 Rue Huygens; a portrait of Lady Mary van Haast (no. 3857) and ‘Three heads of children’ (no. 3858) which the *Journal des Artists* (25 July) complimented and confirmed was a single marble. Forrer also notes her showing a portrait medallion of the psychiatrist Prof. Dr Robert Gaup there (medallions not being in the main catalogue). This all suggests that she started in Vienna but went back there from 1910 to at least 1912, since listed in those years as a member of the Society of Women Artists in Austria (Vereinigung bildender Künstlerinnen Österreichs, est. 1910), with her studio at 22 Marokkanergasse. A brief article (including a portrait photo) appeared in the Vienna magazine *Sport und Salon* of 1 April 1911 (<https://bit.ly/3dM98EH>) calling her ‘Veta v[on] Tcheremissinoff’: it says she had only been doing sculpture for five years, was then working on a statuette of the Russian ambassador’s wife and was planning a studio display of her work. *The Studio* magazine for 1911 (vol 10, ‘Studio Talk’, and its international edition) also mentioned her in relation to her entries in that year’s second exhibition of the Society of Women Artists as ‘Neta Tcheremissinof, a young Russian sculptor residing in Vienna, [who] shows a tight grip of her subject, energy to carry out her artistic intentions, and true workmanship.’ She reportedly received various aristocratic commissions and may have formed an early connection with the noble Kinsky family, who had links there and in Prague: in 1937 she exhibited a tempera portrait of ‘Count P. Kinsky’ at the Royal Academy in London.

Despite this Vienna presence, her apparent ongoing connection to the family home in St Petersburg until 1917 seems to be supported by her involvement as a listed member of the Russian Art Industrial Society (1904–17). In 1911, and perhaps conceived in Vienna, hers was one of 31 proposals submitted for a monument to the Empress Maria Feodorovna in St Petersburg. Though not the formal prize-winner, it was the one progressed, so the Empress may have been consulted, recalled her book purchase of 1904 and expressed a preference. Tcheremissinof completed her life-size clay of the figure of the Empress in May 1914, presumably in St Petersburg, but only photographs of it survive and the scheme foundered with the outbreak of the First World War. She also began another monument project in 1914, when the Society of St Olga in the city of Pskov asked her to design one to the saint there, though (oddly) calling her ‘architect’ rather than sculptor. This was approved by the city council in August, as the war began and killed it off as well. The Hermitage Museum holds both her small bronze bust of Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolaevich, dated 1915, and a second version on an integral plinth, all in plaster: both were presumably done at the same time and in St Petersburg. A Russian file reference also notes her presence at the ‘Psycho-Neurological Institute’ there in 1915 but is not specific as to whether as a patient or perhaps volunteering as wartime assistance.

Although members of her family appear to have remained in what became Petrograd after the Russian Revolution of 1917, she then largely disappeared for 20 years. One possibility, from her elder sister’s later residence in Estonia, is that she and other members of the family fled there. While it is unlikely that she herself went to Japan, in May 1920 a selection of her sculptural work was exhibited in the gallery of the Mitsukoshi department store in Tokyo with watercolours of Japan and Korea by Elizabeth Keith and prints by Charles William Bartlett, both known for Japanese subjects. She may earlier have done a portrait of Jinzo Naruse (1858–1919) the Christian pioneer of Japanese women’s education, but if so it must have been during his European travels outside Japan before 1913 and she perhaps also returned to Austria at some point in the 1920s, given that the Count Kinsky portrait was one of her two exhibits at the Royal Academy in London in 1937: the other was an unidentified portrait bust. She submitted these from 5 Nevern Road, London, SW5, also showed three miniatures at the Royal Society of Miniature Painters in 1937–1938, and in May 1938 (when at 11 Nevern Road) exhibited at the Renaissance Galleries at 9 Lower Regent Street. (Johnson and Greutzner list her just at 7 Nevern Road in both years.) Her last RA exhibit, also in 1938 and illustrated in the catalogue, was an impressive lead bust of the former Headmaster of Winchester College, Montague John Rendall (1862–1950), who explained its genesis and her circumstances in a letter to the Warden of the College, dated 29 January 1939:

I am told that a ‘lead’ bust of me, the work of a very talented and sincere Russian lady, Miss Tcheremisinoff, which was mentioned with strong approval by the press & received an excellent place in last year’s Academy, has been accepted by the Warden & Fellows – May I, in the first place, thank you and them warmly for finding a home for it somewhere in ‘Win: Coll:’. It is an honour which I did not expect.

Secondly, may I say that the making of the bust did not spring from any suggestion of mine. I was reluctantly induced to sit to Miss Tcheremissinoff at Madam Wockoff’s repeated request. Madame Wockoff has a son in College, whom the W. & F. accepted during Lord Selborne’s Wardenship. The two ladies have lately shared a studio in Kensington. They were & are sorely in need of financial help: that was why I came across them.

Madame Tcheremissinoff has made good friends with C[harles]. Wheeler R.A., the sculptor: also Herbert Baker [FRIBA, RA, the architect] has been very good to her.

Rendall had a notable interest in the arts and was clearly prevailed on to help in difficult circumstances, probably through Wheeler, whom he knew well from work that both he and Baker had done for the College under his headmastership, from which he retired in 1924. College records say he presented the bust but also that it was paid for by a number of subscribing donors, probably former pupils. A complimentary note on it, and its recent appropriate positioning in the school museum for ‘the Headmaster who formed and cared for the original collection of Mediaeval and Renaissance sculpture’ there, appeared in *The Wykehamist* (no. 857, 13 June 1939).

How ‘Madame Tcheremissinoff’ subsequently lived is still unknown: perhaps not easily unless she had private income or developed a clientele for which there is no further exhibition evidence. She remained in London and the 1939 Register gives her studio address as 80 Warwick Gardens, Kensington. When she died at 9 Porchester Square on 8 February 1963 – apparently the eve of her 86th birthday – she left ‘effects’ of just £298 12s, probate being granted to an Ekaterina Petroff (1908–1992) whom her will calls her niece but may, rather, have been a godchild and a family connection. Petroff – also an artist – was born in Estonia and was already at Porchester Square when she became a naturalized British citizen in 1952. She remained on the electoral roll there until 1965 and although she does not appear at 80 Warwick Gardens in the 1939 Register (as perhaps not then present) she too is listed as resident there in Kelly’s Directory for the year. So was Rendall’s ‘Madam Wockoff’, who also had studio space there (1937–38) and who was more correctly Vera Nikolaevna Wolkoff (née Scalon), wife of the last Imperial Russian Naval Attache in London (1913–19), Rear-Admiral Nicholas Alexandrovich Wolkoff: both the Wolkoffs and Scalons were also St Petersburg families.

On Ekaterina Petroff’s death in 1992, her heir appears to have been Elizabeth’s niece, Baroness Martha von Rosen (b. Reval, Estonia, 1904 – d. British Columbia, Canada, 2002), the daughter of Anna Petrovna Kügelgen (née Chereminisova, 1875–1967). Martha von Rosen was co-author with her German husband, Baron Jurgen, of the Second World War memoir, *A Baltic Odyssey: War and Survival,* which was edited by Elvi Whittaker from her reminiscences and his journal (Univ. of Calgary Press, 1996). The prefatory matter also notes that Martha’s mother Anna, Elisabeth’s elder sister, was both a well-known biographer and essayist but ‘most renowned, … as an icon painter, doing some of her best work in the later part of her life in Canada’. It reports that many examples are in the Museum of Anthropology, University of British Columbia.

Elisabeth was a talented daughter (and not the only one) of privileged family, whose career opportunities and hard work appear to have fallen casualty to war and revolution. Though safe in England by 1937, and with Russian connections there, the dislocations of exile and renewed world war in her 50s probably prevented her retrieving the level of success she merited.

*Summarised from Art UK discussion based round the bust of M.J. Rendall (1862–1950) in Winchester College. Note that there is a Russian article (cited by Kieran Owens 12.12.21) and another in Japanese (cited by Marcie Doran (23.12. 2021) that have not been accessible for the above:*

N. V. Logdacheva, К изучению скульптуры начала ХХ века: Ю. Н. Свирская и Е. П. Черемисинова (To the study of sculpture at the beginning of the twentieth century: Yu.N. Svirskaya and E.P. Cheremisinova), in [journal] Страницы истории отечественного искусства XVI-ХХ века, Вып. ХIV (Pages of the History of Russian Art of the XVI-XX centuries. Issue XIV, [2007].)

Masubuchi Soichi, ‘Kotaro Takamura and E.Tcheremissinof : The Iconology of Jinzo Naruse’ [in Japanese] in *Memoirs of the Japan Women's University. Faculty of Literature*, no. 33 (1983), pp. 77–101, 1983 (Naruse was founder of the University)

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