**(Vera [?])** **Elizaveta Petrovna Cheremisinova, 1874/7–1963**

Elisabeth Tcheremissinof, as she later styled herself in England, was a Russian sculptor medallist and painter, though this was a redirection after first becoming known as a skilled artist in decorative leatherwork, including bookbinding. Of aristocratic 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 (20 km outside the city) on 13 March of that year 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. All the children seem to have been born (from 1866 on) at 25, Konyushennaya Street in central St Peterburg between the Nevsky Prospekt and Konyushennaya Square, which remained the family home until at least 1917. Their mother was Pyotr’s first wife, Anna Vasilievna Trewheeler (Truveller /Trewheller, 1842–1908), whose own father was William Frederick Trewheeler (1808–1859/ [or 1798-1860?]), a Cornish civil engineer who trained in Russia and settled in St Petersburg from 1833. He also worked on the Russian railways and other utilities and, as an architect, is credited in the edited memoir of his granddaughter Maria 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.

After leaving school Elisabeth appears to have had opportunity to travel and, among other places, visited Egypt, Jerusalem, Italy, France and Switzerland. Her initial artistic work in leather is first evident in the winter of 1903/04, when examples were exhibited at the Österreichischen Museum für Kunst und Industrie 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 1906, 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. One report names her teachers as ‘Strasser, Gauquie, and Roland’ – that is, Arthur Strasser (1854–1927), Henri Desire Gauguie (1858–1927) and possibly 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, suggests she was either there some time before 1896 or that he had travelled to teach elsewhere. An Italian-printed Russian book *Nikolai and Alexandra: court of the last Russian emperors, 1890-1917* (Slavia-Interbook, 1994) includes a short biographical entry claiming that Cheremisinova ‘Completed a full course of study in the workshop of Professor Strasse [i.e. Strasser] in Vienna, then worked at the Académie Colarossi in Paris’ and that she exhibited three works in the 1909 Paris Salon: one of these was a portrait medallion of Prof. Dr Robert Gaup. This suggests that she started in Vienna but she was also back there from 1910 to at least 1912, listed as a member of the Society of Women Artists in Austria (Vereinigung bildender Künstlerinnen Österreichs, established in 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’ and saying she was then working on a statuette of the Russian ambassador’s wife. *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.’ In Vienna, she reportedly received various aristocratic commissions and formed a connection with the aristocratic 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. She 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 that off as well. The Hermitage Museum holds both a small bronze bust by her, dated 1915, of Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolaevich 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 she was a patient or perhaps volunteering as wartime assistance.

Although members her family appear to have remained in what became Petrograd after the Russian Revolution of 1917, she then disappears until 1937 and living at 5 Nevern Road, London, SW5. In that year, and 1938 (when at 11 Nevern Road) she showed three works each at the Royal Academy and the Royal Society of Miniature Painters. In 1938 she also reportedly exhibited at the Renaissance Galleries at 9 Lower Regent Street. The two RA works of 1937 were her tempera portrait of Count Kinsky and an unidentified portrait bust. That shown in 1938 (and illustrated in the RA 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, who had retired from Winchester in 1924, had a notable interest in the arts and was clearly prevailed on to help in difficult circumstances. Since he presented the bust to the College, he must have done so by purchasing it but 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.

In the 1939 Register her studio address is given as 80 Warwick Gardens. When she died at 9 Porchester Square on 8 February 1963 – apparently the eve of her 89th birthday – she left ‘effects’ of just £298 12s, probate being granted to a younger Russian friend and apparently long-time companion, Ekaterina Petroff (1908–1992). Petroff was on the electoral roll at Porchester Square from, 1957–65, and although she does not appear at 80 Warwick Gardens in the 1939 Register (as perhaps not then present) she is listed as resident there in Kelly’s Directory for the year. On her death in 1992, her heir appears to have been Elizabeth’s niece Martha von Rosen (b. Reval, Estonia, 1904 – d. British Columbia, Canada, 2002) the daughter of Anna Petrovna Kügelgen (née Chereminisova, 1875–1967).

Baroness Martha von Rosen was co-author with her 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 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.

*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) that has 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].)

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