Liubov Sergeevna Popova
b. 24 April 1889, Ivanovskoe, near Moscow
d. 25 May 1924, Moscow, Soviet Union

Father: Sergei Maksimovich Popov
Mother: Liubov Vasilievna Zubova
Popova is the second of four children: Sergei, Liubov, Pavel, Olga
1889
Liubov Popova was born into a wealthy family of textile manufacturers and she grew up on the family estate, Krasnovidova. Her father was a philanthropist and a patron of music and the theatre.

1902
The family moves to Yalta in the Crimea where Popova attends the Yaltinskaya Women’s Gymnasium.

1906
The Popov family moves to Moscow where she attends the Arsenievna Gymnasium. She studies for two years at A. S. Alfierov’s school where she receives a degree in literature.

1907
Popova studies in the private studio of the Impressionist painter, Stanislav Zhukovski, Moscow.

1908
She enters the private teaching studio of Konstantin Yuon and Ivan O. Dudin. There she meets Alexander Vesnin, Liumila Prudkovskaya, and Vera Muhkina. Popova is 19.
1909
Travels to Kiev with her family. Visits the Church of St. Cyril with its ancient frescoes, and sees works by Mikhail Vrubel.

1910
Spring
Popova travels to Italy with her family and is greatly impressed by Early Renaissance artists particularly Giotto and Pinturicchio.
June
Visits ancient Russian cities, Novgorod and Pskov where she discovers icon painting and is influenced by medieval church art and architecture.

1911
Autumn
Travels to Great Rostov, Yaroslavl, Suzdahl, Yriev Polsky, Pereslavl, and Kiev. On return, she sets up a studio with Liudmila Prudkovskaya in Moscow.

1912
Summer
Spends the summer in Yaroslavl with Prudkovskaya.
Autumn
In Moscow, works in a co-operative studio rented by Vladimir Tatlin, called the Tower. The artists – Viktor Bart, Kiril Zdanevich, Anna Troyanovskaya, Vladimir Tatlin, Ivan Axionov, Aleksei Grishchenko – each contribute a small fee to pay a model. Becomes very friendly with Nadezhda Udaltsova. Visits the collection of Sergei Shchukin where she sees the Cubism of Braque and Picasso as well as paintings by Matisse, Gauguin, Monet, and other Impressionists.
November
Goes to Paris with Nadezhda Udaltsova, Sofia Karetnikova and Vera Pestel, accompanied by Popova’s governess, Adde Dege. They take up lodgings in a boarding house in Montparnasse recommended by Alexandra Exter, rue Madame, where Exter also lives. December
Begins studying in the teaching studio of Henri Le Fauconnier, Jean Metzinger, and André de Segonzac, the Académie de la Palette, in Montparnasse. Popova is 23.
December 15
• In her diaries, Nadezhda Udaltsova writes that Popova’s “sketches are not bad except that all her figures are distended.” (In Adaskina and Sarabianov, “Liubov Popova”, Amazons of the Avant-Garde, Royal Academy, p. 187.)

1913
Continues her work in La Palette until May, while Udaltsova had returned to Moscow in about February.
January 2
• In her diary, Nadezhda Udaltsova writes: “L. S. is much bolder than I am. Metzinger has already praised her.” (In Adaskina and Sarabianov, “Liubov Popova”, Amazons of the Avant-Garde, Royal Academy, p. 187.)
• In her memoirs, Udaltsova writes: “In November 1912 I went to Paris with Liubov Popova. Sofia Karetnikova and Vera Petel also travelled with us although they soon returned to Moscow. After looking around, Popova and I began to search for a studio. Our intention had been to work with Matisse but his school was already closed, so we went over to Maurice Denis’s studio. But there we ran into a Red Indian with feathers sitting against a red background and we ran away. Someone then told us about La Palette, the studio of Le Fauconnier. We went there and immediately decided that it was what we wanted... [Henri] Le Fauconnier, [Jean] Metzinger and [André Dunoyer de] Segonzac used to visit the studio once a week. Le Fauconnier offered pictorial solutions for the canvas while Metzinger spoke of Picasso’s latest accomplishments. That was still the time of classical Cubism without all the vie banale – which first appeared in the form of wallpaper and appliqués in the works of Braque. Le Fauconnier was a ferocious expert and many a student trembled before the canvas. Both Le Fauconnier and Metzinger responded positively to my works
and I was so happy when Metzinger told me two weeks later, “Vous avez fait de progrès extraordinaire” [“You have made extraordinary progress”]. How the students looked at me! [In *Amazons of the Avant-Garde*, p. 343.]

- Another entry in Udaltsova’s diary reads: “Liubov Sergeevna understood little of what Le Fauconnier was saying. Everything is broken down into a thousand lines; she has no feel for the plane.” (Quoted in D. Sarabianov and N. Adaskina, *Liubov Popova*, p. 41.)

Paris, 3 March 1913: Popova writes to Udaltsova, now in Moscow –

- “Dear Nadezhda Andreevna. Thank your for the letter. There’s a lot I need to tell you and my head is simply reeling, but at least I can mention the important news. I saw the new Picasso’s at Uhde’s and Kahnweiler’s (I sent you *Violin* and *Portrait with a Violin*, only I wasn’t sure if I had sent you the right ones since you did not indicate in your letter which of them you received). They are uncommonly good. I think that they are even more essential than the period of precise form that we all like so much (although that, too, of course, is amazing). *Man with a Guitar* (I sent this to you) at Uhde’s is a very large work. I’ve never seen anything with such a diversity of planes and formal balance. As for its colours, the marble is green and painted photographically while the rest consists of well-defined white, black, and an entire spectrum of greys. [In *Amazons of the Avant-Garde*, pp. 343-4.]

May
- Travels to Brittany with the sculptress, Vera Mukhina, and Boris Ternovets, a sculptor.

Summer
- Returns to Moscow. Popova is 24.

Autumn
- Paints in the communal studio with Tatlin, Udaltsova, Vesnin, Aleksei Morgunov, and others, working from the model. Popova is working in a Cubist style influenced in particular by Jean Metzinger.

1914
- “By 1914 I was working completely independently [of the influence of Parisian Cubism] and exhibited my work in Moscow and St. Petersburg at the exhibitions of the Knave of Diamonds, Tramway V, 0.10, The Store, and others.” *Quoted in Posthumous Exhibition Artist Constructor L. S. Popova.*

January 5 – March 2
- Exhibits in Knave of Diamonds 4, Moscow. Shows *Composition with Figures* and *Tinware.*

March
- Returns to Paris with Vera Mukhina and Iza Burmeister, accompanied by her governess, Adda Dege. Popova is 25.

April – June
- To Italy with Mukhina, Burmeister and Adde Dege. They arrived in Genoa, took a steamer to Livorno and Naples, moving on to Pompeii, Herculaeum and Capri, then to Rome where they remained for two weeks. They also visited Paestum, Florence, Padua, Orvieto, Siena, Milan, Bologna.

- Vera Mukhina wrote in her memoirs that “Popova’s reaction to Italy was very intense, impassioned. If she is preoccupied by a particular question, for example, the relationship of colours, she fixes all her attention on that, looks for that everywhere. If she doesn’t find the answer to that question in a great artist, she passes him by. While she was dashing around over the relationship of colours she was simultaneously determining the intensity of the colour, the weight of the colour.” (Quoted in Sarabianov and Adaskina, *Liubov Popova*, p. 44.)

- Vera Mukhina also recalled: “L. S. was tall, she had a good figure, marvellous eyes and luxuriant hair. Despite all her femininity, she had an incredibly sharp eye for life and art.... She had a marvellous feeling for colour and was all in all very talented. She was the first to begin to unveil the essence of art for me. Until then I had conveyed only what I saw. But if an artist conveys only what he sees then he’s a naturalist. You have to convey what you feel and know. She made me understand that. She taught me how to look at colour, at the handling of colours in the Russian icon, for example. She was excited by everything new. She loved to express her opinions on works of art. I was beginning to see.”

June
- Returns to Paris.

August
- Returns to Russia with the outbreak of War on 1 August.
Autumn
Works from the nude model in Tatlin’s studio and also paints still lifes and musical instruments.

Winter
Weekly gatherings in her Moscow family apartment with artist friends, to talk about art. 
Attending were Grishchenko, Pestel, Ternovets, Udaltsova, and Alexander Vesnin, Malevich sometimes attending. Also attending were Boris von Eding, Boris Vipper, the philosopher Pavel Florensky, and others.

1915
March 3
Exhibits in First Futurist Exhibition of Paintings Tramway V, Petrograd. Also exhibiting were Kazimir Malevich, Vladimir Tatlin, Ivan Puni, Ivan Kliun, Olga Rozanova, Nadezhda Udaltsova, and Alexandra Exter.

“Moscow October 11, 1915 No. 1”
Popova writes to Adda Dege:
• “Dear Adda Robertovna: I don’t know whether you will receive these postcards of mine but I would like to send them to you so that you will have an idea of some of my works which I plan to send to an exhibition in Petrograd.”

Sketch for portrait (of Pavel)”  October 17 1915 – postmark.
written underneath by Popova.

October 17 1915 – postmark.


October 19 1915. “Moscow. No. 2”.

Popova writes to Adda Dege:
October 17 1915 – postmark “My dear Adelaide, I received your letter of October 10. Thank you for it. In the next few days I will write you a long and detailed letter – for the moment I want only to send you this photo. I kiss you, also Lissitchka, Aunt Berta, and your mother. Greet all those living in your household and friends. Popa sends you his greetings. Sasha also asked me to send you her greetings. She says, ‘I would have written myself if I knew how.’"
Popova writes to Adda Dege:

• “The photographs on these postcards are not good, bad paper. On ordinary pieces of paper they come out much better but I’m sending them all the same so that you will have an idea of them. I want to have the large paintings photographed because without a blue filter the “valeurs” come out wrong. But these things are mostly black and white. That’s why the “valeurs” are more or less right.” On the postcard Popova has written: “Portrait (plastic drawing)”.

[Image of portrait drawing]

Portrait (plastic drawing).

December 16 – 17 January 1916
Exhibits in Last Futurist Exhibition of Paintings 0.10, in the Dobychina Art Bureau, Petrograd. Popova is 26.

1916
March
Exhibits in Futurist Exhibition The Store, in Moscow, an all-Cubist exhibition organised by Vladimir Tatlin.

• “My Cubist period (the problem of form) was followed by my Futurist period (the problem of movement and colour).” Quoted in Posthumous Exhibition Artist Constructor. L. S. Popova. 31 . 3 . 1916, Moscow – postmark
Popova writes to her former governess, Adda Dege:

• “Christ is risen. My dear Adelaide, greetings my dear. I feel very guilty towards you. I haven’t written for such a long time, but there is so much to do and so many worries. I just cannot find time to write to you in detail about everything. I will soon write you a long letter. I miss you very much my dearest. I would so much love to see you and to share my sadness with you. In a couple of days I might perhaps leave for Turkestan, to Samarkand. If it will work out, from there I should like to travel to you. I will write to you about all that. Until then be well. I kiss you, Liuba”.
April
Travels with her family and three aunts to Samarkand where she is greatly impressed by Islamic architecture.

- Popova writes to Alexander Vesnin: “Fantastic architecture! Frontal and exclusively decorative. The façade does not express the plan or forms of the whole building, but the dimensions, the balance of proportions, the decorativeness of colour, the ornaments (all faced with coloured tiles, many of which have crumbled) create a unique impression.”

May
Visits Adda Dege in Birsk.
June 23, Moscow

- “My dear Adda Robertovna: We just received your card. I kiss you for it. I’ve been travelling with you in my thoughts through the small Archangelski and onto Galkin Hill. Often, very often, I remember you in the wide horizons of Birsk and the yellow-red slopes. Here everything is as it was. Mother feels a little better now. Tomorrow we move directly to Krasnovodsk. Three aunts and A. T. Soldatova also went travelling on the Volga. I kiss Lissitchka for her p. c. and will soon write her. There are a couple of questions about her commission. Greetings to everyone. The Vesnin brothers are going to build a chapel in our factory yard to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the factory. Liubov.” On the front of the postcard Popova wrote: “Jug on a Table (plastic painting)”.
Autumn
Attends meetings at Nadezhda Udaltsova’s apartment in Moscow to discuss Malevich’s new painting, Suprematism. Joins the SUPREMUS Society of Artists.

• “My principle of abstracting the parts of the object was followed logically and inevitably by abstraction of the object itself – the path to non-objectivity. The problem of formal and linear construction now gave way to the problem of depiction (post-Cubism). The same with colour (Suprematism).” Quoted in Posthumous Exhibition of the Artist Constructor L. S. Popova.

November
Exhibits in Knave of Diamonds 5, Moscow, showing six works titled: “Painterly Architectonics – Shak - i- Zinda”

December 10 – 14 January 1917
Exhibits in Modern Russian Painting, Dobychina Art Bureau, Petrograd.

1917

L. Popova, 6 Engravings, 1917.
Spring – Autumn
Does Suprematist designs for the embroidery project of Natalia Davydova in Verbovka, near Kiev.

May
Supremus journal nearly ready for the printers, according to a letter from the secretary, Olga Rozanova. It is never printed.

October
Decides not to take part in Knave of Diamonds 6, Moscow. At a preliminary meeting of the group on 31 October, a split had occurred when Vladimir Tatlin had proposed renaming the forthcoming exhibition, which would include an important number of avant-garde works. His proposal was rejected and he, together with Lev Bruni, Nadezhda Udaltsova, Popova and others, resign from the group.

1918
March
Marries Boris Nikolaevich von Eding (1890-1919). Popova is 28. Von Eding is an art historian specialising in ancient Russian architecture. Begins to sign some of her works and manuscripts, “Liubov von Eding” or L. Popova-Eding through to at least 1922.

April
Collaborates with Alexander Vesnin on decorations for the Mass Soviet May Day celebration.

May – June
Exhibits in First Exhibition of Paintings of the Professional Association of Artists, Moscow.

November
Son is born. Popova is 29.

1919
Very few works are known for this year.

February
Exhibits in Vth State Exhibition – From Impressionism to Non-Objective Art, Moscow.

April
Exhibits in Xth State Exhibition – Non-Objective Creation and Suprematism. Moscow.

Summer
Drastic food shortages in Moscow so Popova travels to Rostov-on-Don with von Eding and their baby son, accompanied by Adda Dege. Von Eding contracts typhus and dies. Popova becomes seriously ill with typhus and then typhoid fever but is nursed back to health by Adda Dege. She is left with a severe heart condition. Popova is 30.

November
Returns to Moscow with her little son, aged one year.

About twenty works are acquired by the Purchasing Committee of the Museum of Artistic Culture, Moscow, and are sent to various of the Museum branches in Moscow, Petrograd,
Smolensk, Irkutsk, Yaroslavl, Ekaterinburg, Perm, Tabolsk, Tashkent, Vladivostok, and others.

1920
Popova spends many months recovering from illness and grief, and only slowly re-enters her artistic world.

May
Institute of Artistic Culture, INKhUK, formally established and Popova becomes a member.

November 29
SVOMAS reorganised and renamed VKhUTEMAS, Higher State Artistic and Technical Workshops. Popova resumes teaching there.

1921
January – March
Composition and Construction debates in INKhUK. Popova is secretary, recording the debates of March.

Spring
Popova begins to teach in the State Higher Theatrical Workshops, VVYTM, headed by Vsevolod Meyerhold.
With Alexander Vesnin, designs enormous set for a mass spectacle, Struggle and Victory, for meeting of the 3rd Comintern – World Congress of the Communist International, Moscow.

September
Exhibits in 5 x 5 = 25, Moscow. Shows five paintings all grouped under the heading,
• “Experiments with Painterly-Force Constructions”, describing them in the catalogue as: “All the experiments shown here are painterly and must be considered only as a series of preparatory experiments for concrete material constructions.”

Two of her five cover designs for the catalogue of 5 x 5 = 25

Autumn
Invited to teach in the State Institute of Theatrical Art, GITIS, of which Vsevolod Meyerhold was the Director. Her course is entitled, Analysis of the Elements of Material Design. At the VKhUTEMAS, Popova and Alexander Vesnin share the colour studio, Discipline No. 1 – Colour.
• A former student, Boris Rybchenko, wrote that the “young, amazingly beautiful, ever cordial, festively dressed Liubov Sergeevna seemed to glow.... She believed that the highest form of the new art was abstraction... Liubov Sergeevna tried to make us understand the supreme principles of constructing something beautiful, free from the reality of the surrounding material world...This, it appears, also prompted Liubov Sergeevna to tame her own, to some extent, feminine... form of Suprematism.” (In Amazons of the Avant-Garde, Royal Academy, p. 189.)

November
Signs INKhUK proclamation for the end of easel painting and art into production, together with Rodchenko et al. With this she begins her design work for the theatre, book and poster design, fabric and clothing design. Popova nevertheless continued to do paintings, a few signed 1923 and 1924.
1922
April 25
Premiere of Meyerhold’s production of Fernand Crommelynck, The Magnanimous Cuckhold. Sets and costumes by Popova.
April 27
Gives a paper at INKhUK on The Magnanimous Cuckhold.
October
Exhibits in 1st Exhibition of Russian Art, Galerie Van Diemen, Berlin.

1923
February
Together with A. Vesnin, A. Rodchenko, and N. Lavinsky, Popova leaves the Foundation Department at VKhUTEMAS to enter the Productivist Department with the intention of teaching theatre sets and costumes, advertising, and design. The Department becomes oriented towards architecture.
March 4
Premiere of Meyerhold’s production of Sergei Tretiakov’s, Earth in Turmoil, Moscow. Sets and costumes by Popova.
Summer
• Popova and Alexander Vesnin travel to the Caucasus. As the wife of Vesnin’s brother Viktor, writes in her memoirs, the “younger Vesnin fell in love with this gifted, beautiful woman as a young man and preserved his feeling for her throughout his life, even though she married another man”. (In Amazons of the Avant-Garde, Royal Academy, p. 189.)
Autumn
Begins creating posters on commision.
Late Autumn into 1924
Popova and Varvara Stepanova design fabrics for First State Textile Print Factory, the former Tsindel Textile Print Factory, Moscow. They also create fashion designs. Popova left over 100 textile designs and several dozen clothing designs in her studio.
• Ivan Aksionov wrote in his tribute to the artist that on May 12, 1924, “Popova said that no single artistic success gave her such profound satisfaction as the sight of peasants and workers buying pieces of her material. And indeed, this past spring all Moscow was wearing fabrics with designs by Popova without knowing it – vivid, strong designs full of movement, like the artist’s own nature.”

Varvara Stepanova and Liubov Popova, 1924
Photograph by Aleksandr Rodchenko

From a humorous magazine, c. 1924
“Anton: Where are you going, Liubovka”
“Liubov: I’m taking my week’s output of cotton designs to Tsindel.”
May 22 – Popova's son, aged 5, contracts scarlet fever (scarlatina) and dies.

May 25 – Popova dies of scarlatina, aged 35.

June (?)

- On the back of the wedding photograph (1918) Popova's father writes: “To dearest sister Mashenka in memory of her sympathy for our grief in those terrible times, May 22-25 1924 SP”.
December 21

Opening of Posthumous Exhibition Artist Constructor L. S. Popova at the Museum of Artistic Culture, located in premises of State Higher Artistic and Technical Workshops, VKhUTEMAS, Moscow. It was organised by her colleagues and friends. Vesnin and Aksionov catalogue the works in her studio, which were exhibited, most of which remaining with Pavel Popov until they were purchased in the 1960s by George Costakis, Moscow.

Compiled by Patricia Railing

SOURCES

Posthumous Exhibition Artist Constructor L. S. Popova, Moscow, December 1924. Texts by Pavel Popov, O. M. Brik.

*New Viewer / Novyi zritel*, No. 23, 1924.

Osip Brik, “L. Popova”, *Zrelishcha*, Moscow, No. 89, 1924.

Ivan Aksionov, “Posmertnaia vystavka K. S. Popovoi”, *Zhizn iskusstvo / Life of Art*, No. 5, 1925.


