

Art & Artists of the Suburb

Hampstead Garden Suburb is known for its intellectual, liberal, artistic, musical and literary associations and has been home to artists since its very inception. In fact, even before its creation the area and its surrounds was a magnet to artists with its proximity to Hampstead Heath providing inspiration with its majestic beauty and changing seasonal landscapes. In this issue Suburb News looks at past and present artists of the Suburb and their relationship with this extraordinary place.

David Breuer-Weil and his art

SHELLEY-ANNE SALISBURY

It's not often you see a pick-up truck transporting a giant torso and pair of legs all akimbo but this is exactly what I witnessed back in June this year on Wildwood Road whilst out on the school run. The pick-up truck and its anatomical cargo were causing quite a commotion. It was all pretty surreal.

I recognised the body parts as a sculpture by the globally renowned artist David Breuer-Weil who, as it turns out, lives on Wildwood Road. He had been hoping to install the sculpture ('Alien') in his garden (alongside the sculpture of the half-submerged head ("Visitor") only to find the legs wouldn't fit through the side gate. You really couldn't make it up.

Originally from Stanmore, and after a brief spell in Israel, David settled in the Suburb with his wife Samantha, starting in Heathcroft, then Erskine Hill and finally Wildwood Road where they have now lived for just over 10 years. David walks on the Heath Extension regularly and feels a spiritual connection to it. It's

become something of a muse for David's work and David told me he sees something new in the landscape every time. William Blake is an inspiration and David often walks past 'Old Wylde's' the house where Blake stayed as a guest of his artist friend John Linnell on Wylde's Close, North End. David feels the Suburb, so closely aligned to its natural surrounds, was and still is a perfect place for artists and can understand why an artistic community settled here at the turn of the 20th century.

The pandemic had a profound effect on David who caught covid in early 2020 and spent much of the first lockdown drawing and painting almost therapeutically, producing a copious body of work 'The Pandemic Collection'. He was hyper aware of nature, the weather and the impact of isolation, not only on himself but others too. This has all been processed in a highly cerebral way and transposed onto canvas. Part of the work he produced was what is now referred to as the 'Golden Drawings', sixty-six pencil drawings illuminated with gold leaf. The drawings represent



David Breuer-Weil stands next to his creation 'Visitor' (Photo: Shelley-Anne Salisbury)

different aspects and experiences of the pandemic; David's own covid symptoms, his daily walks and even the weekly applause for the NHS. These drawings are highly spiritual and introspective, the difficult subject matter juxtaposed against brilliant gold representing the glorious sunshine we all experienced at the time.

David has since created some very large paintings which form the body of work entitled 'The New Normal' which he is hoping to be able to display in the vast spaces of somewhere like the Tate Britain's Duveen galleries, usually reserved for installations. 'Pandemic' and 'Lockdown' are just two of the huge canvas works making up this powerful collection.

In complete contrast, David has also been working on a series of bright and bold landscapes which he paints in his wonderfully natural garden (which feels like a continuation of the Heath Extension) using an unusual arrangement of tree stumps and tree branches as his easel. David explained these landscapes represent a different, lighter side of himself, less cerebral, more playful, and they reflect outpourings of pure joy.

David Breuer-Weil is a visceral artist. He lays out his emotions bare on the canvas, in a sculpture or whatever medium he is working in. He doesn't pull any punches.

He transposes his thoughts as they form and does little or no editing. He says, "Art needs to be relevant to the moment it depicts."

His latest installation 'Flight' was commissioned by Camden Council and is situated in the grounds of St Pancras New Church, Kings Cross. 'Flight' references the human race taking off after coming through this period of uncertainty and curtailment.

David's sculptures have a Giacometti meets Gormley feel. Somewhat alien-like and disturbing but, at the same time, vulnerable, defenceless and raw. David intelligently and sensitively manifests the human condition in each of them and we connect with them because of this.

David Breuer-Weil's significance has been assessed by leading art historians as "a logical heir to the School of London painters" and as I left his house in Wildwood Road, I looked back and sized up the best position for that eventual blue plaque.

For more information on David Breuer-Weil and his work see:

- The Covid:** <https://tinyurl.com/hvmf932p>
- The New Normal:** https://youtu.be/2c8XiYsF_To
- Link to information about the 23 foot sculpture, Flight, in King's Cross** <https://www.davidbreuerweil.com/all/news/flight/>

'Flight' (Photo: Sam Roberts)



"Is this straight?" (Photo: Shelley-Anne Salisbury)



Part of the Pandemic Collection (Photo: David Breuer-Weil)