

SUBURB ARTIST IN RESIDENCE
featuring Shizue Takahashi

Shizue Takahashi was born in Niigata, Japan. After her education finished she worked as a lab technician. However, since childhood Shizue had always been interested in drawing but never seriously pursued this and never dreamed of becoming an artist.



All this changed when she came to the UK in 1976 to learn English and get some experience of European culture. She first sampled the Suburb when she was an au pair here and went to English classes at The Institute. Having mastered her use of English she took up painting at the Camden Art Centre before enrolling at St Martin's School of Art firstly at evening classes then to take a BA in Fine Art which she achieved with flying colours. She also learned about painting with oils which she enjoyed and did many large landscapes and townscapes with them. I asked Shizue what initially captivated her first when she arrived in London, "I was struck by the beauty of nature, particularly the trees. I liked the muted light and misty skies here, whereas in Japan everything seemed terribly bright. That was not particularly suitable for watercolours whereas here the subtleness of the shades lend themselves to that medium which later became my favourite style of work.

I was also thrilled to be exposed to the originals of all the masters, such as Van Gogh, Turner and Vermeer on my frequent visits to London's excellent choice of galleries. I particularly liked the realism of Vermeer as I prefer to paint what I see rather than indulge in abstract art." She continued "a picture must speak for itself – independent of me – as an artist. I don't want to stand in front of my pictures, I want to be behind them, they should need no explanation from me. At this stage in our conversation, over some delicious Japanese tea, the mild mannered lady who had opened the front door, seemingly quite shy and nervous, showed such enthusiasm for the subject that I was hard pressed to keep up! She was lavish in her praise for David Hockney "he paints the real world," and she loves his quote "teaching someone to draw is teaching them to look." One of Shizue's favourite 'jobs' is to go the annual Ryedale Festival in Yorkshire where she was invited by the President, Christopher Glynn (the Vice President is the composer Richard Rodney Bennett) to sketch the musicians. She initially went in 2007 and 2008. In 2013 the Arts Council stopped their grant to the Festival so they held a major fund raising event in London, where again Shizue was asked to draw. She returned to the Festival that summer and sketched at venues as diverse as Ampleforth Abbey and Castle Howard, which were venues at the event. She went on to say, "when I got married and started a family" – she has two children both of whom were educated at The Garden Suburb School – "I had zero time for painting in oils because they take up a lot of space and time but I started to carry a small sketchbook in my handbag which I still do and developed a love of using watercolours. My sketchbooks mean that I can catch any moment in my daily life, I started this out of desperation because of my lack of time, but it became my preferred way of working. I don't have a mobile phone, so I can concentrate on my work with no interruptions. I sketch the current moment and I remember things so clearly when I look at my little books – if I can't sketch I get bored with things. I try to make the best use of my time, even if I only have one hour I'll park the car, observe nature and draw. I love the horse chestnuts in Northway and the Suburb trees, all of them, every tree is different in this world and I like to pay great attention to detail when I draw them. I find nature fascinating and amazing. "At this point Shizue went to a cupboard and produced 131 sketchbooks – I could have spent hours pouring over them. Shizue's affinity with the Garden Suburb Gallery goes back many years, when it was located in Hampstead Way and continues since it moved to Fellowship House. The original fans that gave her much encouragement included Ruth Smith, Gerlinde Crossley, Annie Walker and Richard Wakefield. When Susie Gregson popped into the Gallery and saw a work that Shizue had done of the St Jude's Proms she decided that it would make a great poster for the Proms Season and asked her to become 'Artist in Residence' for that annual event. Shizue has also been commissioned by many Suburb residents to paint their houses. In addition to frequently manning the Suburb Gallery she was egged on by Peter Falk, some 5 years ago, to start weekly drawing and watercolour classes for aspiring artists. She has done this since then and continues to do so. She added, "anyone with eyes and hands can draw." Having looked at some of my efforts, I'm not sure that I can completely agree with that statement! She also enjoys the talks at Fellowship on a Tuesday afternoon which she thinks are of a very high standard. Her drawing means she spends a lot of time on the Suburb mostly with English people but she now attends yoga classes where her fellow pupils are Indian and t'ai chi classes where they are Chinese. She is a true cosmopolitan. Her last remark to me before I left was, "all the time I am still learning, still developing." How wonderful to be like Shizue and have such insatiable curiosity about the world. S



Choosing the right windows will enhance your house and protect its value

Many Suburb houses are at an age where the windows need attention. This does not necessarily mean they need to be replaced. The original windows may just require some repair and redecoration.

For residents keen to thermally upgrade their homes, timber double glazed windows can usually be made to closely match originals. There are examples of these throughout the Suburb that are almost indistinguishable from the windows they replaced. But careful detailing is needed to get the appearance right. The Trust is happy to advise homeowners on how to get the right result. And Trust Consent is always required for replacement windows.



UPVC windows like these detract from the appearance of your house. They are often marketed as being maintenance free. These claims are incorrect. They do not have a long life, they cannot be repaired when damaged and they seriously devalue your house.



Repairing your existing windows is often the most cost effective option. Adding draught stripping will have a dramatic effect on heat loss and costs very little.



Replacement timber or steel windows can normally be double glazed to enhance the thermal efficiency of your property.



Timber windows can be easily repaired, prolonging the life of the window and keeping the character of the house.