

Artists in their studio

TOMO CAMPBELL

EMILY TOBIN visits the painter, whose canvases blur the lines between figurative and abstract, with shifting scenes and classical allusions

PHOTOGRAPHS **JOSHUA MONAGHAN**



PEOPLE *artist*



Painting is a grounding process,' says Tomo Campbell. 'It requires balance.' The artist works from an industrial space in Leyton, far enough off the beaten track to allow for focus. His large and sprawling canvases are neither one thing nor the other. Not quite figurative, not quite abstract. Stay with his work long enough and you will catch glimpses of Greek gods with aquiline noses and bountiful curls. There are hunting parties, hounds and unicorns – all denoted in rich colours and bold layers, which pulse with kinetic energy. His densely packed compositions seem to shift and scatter under your gaze. As Tomo puts it, 'They are never quite solid or whole.' He repeats motifs again and again, often drawing on Flemish tapestries and Victorian paintings: 'I like to exhaust and repeat things, re-editing and cracking into my own process.' Tomo often paints surrounded by his own work, elements of which make their way back into his current project. It is a constant cycle, summed up by his comparison to music: 'If my work was an album, it would be made up of the same song played 10 different ways.'

His titles are pleasingly poetic and wry, too: *Come on Den Nortti, Julie and the Duke*; or *I'm Still Not Quite Sure What You're Even on About*. They have the staccato rhythm of snippets of conversation or text messages and poke fun at the grandiose titles often bequeathed to artworks. The contrast between the irreverent wording and the oil paintings that they describe makes for a canny combination. It hooks you in and encourages you to spend more time with the work because, of course, as Tomo points out, 'A successful painting is one that you keep looking at' □

Tomo Campbell is represented by Cob Gallery: cobgallery.com



PREVIOUS PAGE Tomo in front of his 2017 oil painting *Never Never*. THIS PAGE He paints surrounded by his previous works; elements of his densely packed compositions often reappear in subsequent paintings. Seen here are details from *Never Never* and (behind Tomo) a work in progress