

Artists in their studio

CHRISTOPHER LE BRUN

FIONA MCKENZIE JOHNSTON and photographer JOSHUA MONAGHAN visit the painter and former president of the Royal Academy of Arts in the south London building he co-owns with the publisher of his prints



'When I get tired, I paint better, because I lose my resistance to myself,' explains Christopher Le Brun. The artist, who was president of the Royal Academy of Arts from 2011 to 2019 and was knighted in 2021 for his services to the arts, is describing his lock-in method. This sees him painting through the night, responding to the canvas and colours to create vast, complex abstractions. The process requires both mental and physical exertion, and there is a bedroom on the mezzanine level of his studio for when exhaustion overcomes him: 'When I wake up, it's like someone else painted the picture.'

Christopher has been working in this building in Camberwell for around 30 years, initially as a tenant, sharing it with the fine art printer Hope (Sufferance) Press. Victor Pasmore, Peter Doig, Damien Hirst, Prunella Clough, Antony Gormley and Anish Kapoor have all produced work within these walls. Then, 20 years ago, Christopher and his print-publisher Charles Booth-Clibborn of Paragon Press bought the building. 'I've got the top floor, he's got the middle floor and we share the storage on the ground floor,' explains Christopher.

The layout, he says, happened organically. A small library, where shelves hold maquettes of his figurative sculpture as well as books, divides two vast rooms. One overlooks the gardens of an estate and is still devoted to printmaking (the Tate owns an edition of Christopher's *Fifty Etchings*, produced with Paragon Press). 'I paint in the other, as it is more private,' he says. 'Then, when I think I've finished a painting, I take it through to the printing room and hang it on the wall, and spend days or weeks walking past it, seeing if it's ready, if it's stopped being needy. If I lack confidence in a painting, it goes back into the studio.'

But change is afoot and this is likely the last interview Christopher will conduct from this space. 'Historically, I haven't always been able to do lock-ins. I wanted to maintain my family, and the human reality of other people's feelings is relevant and important.' Now that his children have grown up and left home, he and his wife – the artist Charlotte Verity – have bought a house in Somerset in which they can each have a studio. The lock-ins will, in a sense, be permanent. 'At this age, I should have 10 more good years,' says Christopher, adding with palpable excitement, 'I want to use every minute' □ *Christopher Le Brun: christopherlebrun.co.uk. The artist is represented by Lisson Gallery: lissongallery.com*

LEFT Christopher in the studio he uses for painting in front of [title and date of work?] TOP FROM LEFT The artist's shoes are splattered with years of paint. He uses old pots to prop up large canvases when working on them