

i-D

tomo campbell is the young london artist who makes paint vibrate

The former football hopeful turned painter has a new solo exhibition of work that looks at subjects in search of something more.



Photo Carly Scott

Tomo Campbell is the 28-year-old Twickenham-born painter and Central Saint Martins graduate whose solo exhibition, *Held on the Tips of Fingers*, opens at the Golborne Gallery in Notting Hill this month.

The artist, whose career was kickstarted after Mario Testino bought his degree show work, has created nine new large-scale paintings for the exhibition. The

works feature colourful, abstract scenes of hunting, parades and explorers shape-shifting across each canvas in order to create a sense of something deliberately unfinished, and, as Campbell puts it, “never quite solid or whole.”

We speak to the former artist-in-residence at the English National Ballet about the exhibition and his unlikely life as the only artist in a family of footballers.

How did you get your start as an artist - you studied fine art at Central Saint Martins, did you come from an artistic family?

My family has no artistic background at all, actually. My dad was a football coach and all the kids grew up wanting to be footballers, so I always assumed that would be what I'd do. I didn't even know you could actually be an artist until I was about 17 and got into art school.

What drew you to painting in particular?

I've always been painting. Everyone did it as a kid - I just never stopped. The more I painted, the more the process would crack itself open and reveal new depths to explore. What gets me about paint is that it's a fluid medium, and I'm interested in this kind of fluidity between one thing and another.

Kind of like kicking a football! So what's the story behind the works in the show?

The paintings are variations of the same thing, displayed all at once. They are a search for something that progress and digress at the same time, like a route that has an infinite amount of detours within it. In this show the subjects are explorers and hunters, searching for something they're not sure of, I guess. I suppose it's a little back and forth between the viewer who is also searching for something.

What is your creative process like - with all these infinite detours and loops, where does an idea begin?

I like the idea of slowing down the viewer, so they can't just look at it once and think they've sussed it out. I want [the images] to slowly reveal themselves or dissolve. So when I'm painting I try and balance things on the edge of being there and not quite being there. I try and paint in a way that makes the paint vibrate, to make it look light and delicate and on the cusp of shifting.

You've mentioned before that your work is meant to appear as if it has no beginning or end. So how do you know when a painting is finished?

That's one of the hardest decisions I suppose. I guess what it comes down to is that I don't have an image in my mind I'm trying to get to, I don't have a set way to start and I definitely don't have a clear point of completion. I kind of abandon them and move on rather than complete them.

Your interest in movement seems particularly relevant to your work as artist-in-residence for the English National Ballet, what was that like?

Dancers from the start were interesting to me. I was watching all the rehearsals and watching how the ballets develop. You'd see these people who can make their bodies move with an ease you can't fathom. But when I'd see a dancer land wrong or lose balance even for a millisecond, I'd notice. It wasn't a case of pointing out a mistake, though. Instead what it did for me was highlight how the other 99% was perfect. If the whole thing was flawless I think one could misconceive the dance as easy or effortless and tame. That really interested me, the idea of mistakes being useful as a way of creating meaning.

Is there a wider creative scene in London that you feel closely connected to?

I have friends who work in fashion, journalism, music, art... There are always people talking about ideas or projects they've got or things they've done, and I'm massively into that and really interested in how different people think. There are lots of conversations about ideas all the time. Everyone is kind of buzzing for everyone else.

Held on the Tips of Fingers runs until June 12 at the Golborne Gallery, 72 Golborne Road, W10 5PS.

Credits

Text Bunny Kinney

Photography Carly Scott