

MY STUDIO

Michele Del Campo

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY: STEVE PILL

When Michele Del Campo greets us at the door of his North London home, he is standing in a long, white lab coat. If it weren't for the colourful splashes of oil paint down his front, you would think he was a chemist or a GP, not a promising young artist. However, the coat is just the first of many clues that mark Del Campo out as the most unusual of practitioners.

The artist works from a home studio in a light, north-facing back room, with crisp white walls and a pine floor

covered in plastic sheeting. His latest, half-finished canvas sits on the easel – a dramatic cornfield with two figures that is set to feature in his forthcoming exhibition, *Close Strangers*. Around the easel, everything is geared towards creating an efficient and concentrated working environment.

Seven wooden palettes covered in removable plastic sheets are stacked alongside the one currently in use. Tubes of paint are laid out in order, from lightest to darkest, on a self-modified set of drawers that has extra shelves and palette knives hung from bent nails. Next to that sits a rack of

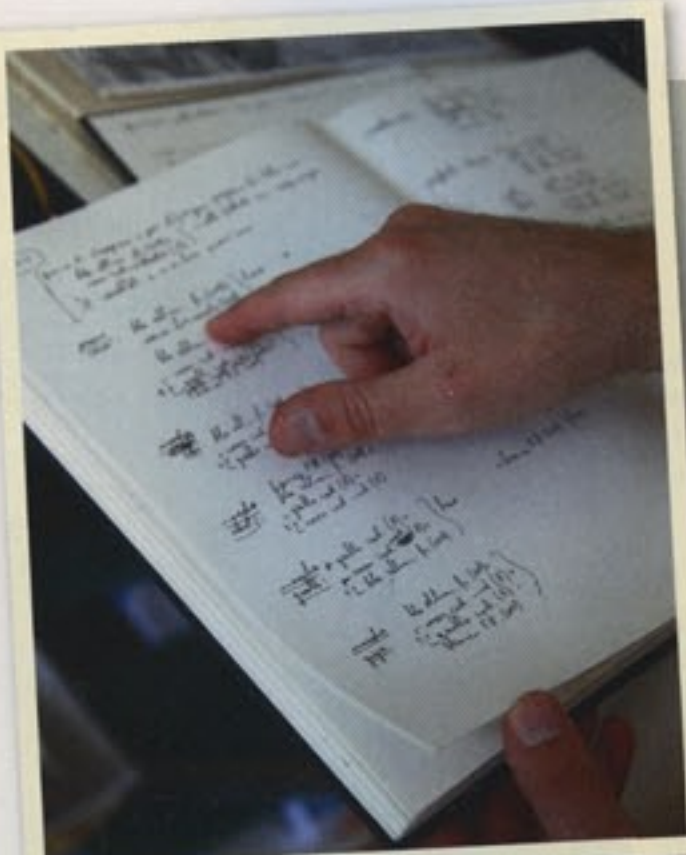
fresh tubes of Winsor & Newton oils, several of each colour. Casters have been attached to the bottom of the easel and other workstations so that they can be easily slid around the floor to suit each painting's specific dimensions and requirements. The artist's wife is a trainee architect but even she would struggle to design a more efficient workspace.

The space is remarkably tidy, but there is still room for a few personal touches. Audiobooks from the local library are piled high for listening during long painting sessions and the wall above his desk is decorated with

BELOW Michele at work in his North London studio
OPPOSITE PAGE A few of the racks and notebooks he uses to keep himself in order



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favourite illustrations and photographs from his time abroad. Along the edges of bookshelves laden with monographs on Elizabeth Peyton and Edward Hopper, Del Campo has glued the caps from every tube of paint he has used in the past two years. "It's like a history of my painting," he grins.

Not only that, but he also tallies them in a notebook. "Every time I finish a colour, I put a small line and the date when I finished it. So I know, for example, that I use 20ml of white every two weeks and I need an Ultramarine Blue every month and a half."

At his own reckoning, Del Campo says that at any one time, he has exactly enough paint to last him for one full year. His rational approach has other benefits too. "You can also calculate how much money you have spent on a painting. Artists have this habit of not knowing what they really spend on their work. They tend to underestimate their prices but I calculate everything. All my expenses are on the computer already, for transport, advertisements, even glue. It helps me work out how much I really earn."

Del Campo is similarly regimented in other aspects of his practice. In notebooks, he has recorded the time he spends on every painting and the exact colours he uses. He mixes samples on scraps of paper, clips them to a washing line to dry and files them away for safe keeping. He laughs at the suggestion that he might be a mild sufferer of obsessive compulsive disorder. Has he always worked like this at least? "No, I'm becoming more and more organised. You have to take time to write down these things in the

diaries but in the end you save time. For example, if a painting has been damaged in transport and you can't remember whether you used Cobalt Blue or Ultramarine Blue, you can go back to the diary."

Fresh from stays in Spain and Scotland, Del Campo first moved to London two and a half years ago but struggled to find a flat that had a suitable space for painting. "We saw a lot of places," he recalls. "Most ceilings were lower compared

with Spain and Italy. This flat is good but when I make larger paintings, I still have to sit on the ground. If it was any lower, I would be lying down!"

Despite the difficulties, he didn't consider looking for a separate workspace. "I chose to have a studio in my house, rather than somewhere outside, because I like being able to live with [my art]. You don't need to dress up and go outside. If I want to work at night, it's here; if I get fed up, I can still walk out the door."

With the bustle and greenery of Highbury Fields on his doorstep and his fondness for photographing passersby for potential subject matter, it is a wonder that the artist doesn't step out more often. In truth, he takes the majority of his reference shots in summer trips to Barcelona and admits that he has found it difficult to mix with other artists in the UK. In a couple of years, he plans to return to either Spain or Italy with his wife to 'settle'. For now though, he is content to load up another audiobook and maintain that impressive work ethic in this unusually well-kept laboratory of fine art. ■

ARTIST'S BIO

Name
Michele Del Campo
Born
Foggia, Italy, 1976
Training
Duncan of Jordanstone
College of Art & Design,
Dundee; Universidad
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Next Exhibition
Close Strangers, 28 June –
10 July, The Gallery in Cork
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More info
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