

# The Telegraph

## Christopher Le Brun president of the RA, remembers working in his studio, 1986

Christopher Le Brun talks to Siân Ranscombe about working in Berlin and the support of his parents



This was taken at my studio in Peckham, south London. I had built this freestanding wall in the middle of the room and spent most of my time up a ladder because the paintings I was working on were so big. There was a lot of standing back, yards and yards away, for perspective.

The painting here was the result of the printing I'd previously been doing in Santa Barbara – I would make a few visits every few years to make monotypes, a type of print whereby you paint directly on to a plate for a unique proof. We worked in an old orange warehouse and looking out of the bay windows one way you could see the mountains and in the other direction was the ocean. There was a gymnasium in which the son of the printer, Garner Tullis, would work out. When I arrived, weedy and pale from London, he said to me, 'We like to go for a run in the morning and then we work with a trainer, but it's nothing at all to worry about.' I told him I had no kit, thinking that would get me out of it, but they bought

Ranscombe, Siân. "Christopher Le Brun, president of the RA, remembers working in his studio, 1986." *The Telegraph*, July 11, 2014.

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me trainers and a tracksuit. I ended up running, swimming, working out and doing weights for a week. When I got back to Peckham I had a massive appetite, my personality was starting to change, and I was completely out of my environment in London.

Shortly after this I went to live with my wife and children in Berlin as part of the German academic exchange programme. This was before the Wall came down, when it was effectively still an island. In order to get to Berlin you had to go down a corridor with Russians and East Germans watching you through binoculars. It was extremely sinister and really uncomfortable. I lived there for a year and made a lot of work there, and while I remember the feeling of being slightly in prison it was a wonderful education in European history. There was absolutely no one arty in my family – my father was in the Royal Marines – so it's a mystery as to how I became an artist. Whatever I did with my life, my mother was convinced that it was inevitable. When I got into the Slade she said, 'Yes, I thought you would.' When I got my first exhibition she said, 'Quite right.' On one level it was very reassuring and on the other it was exhausting because I couldn't really impress her – but it shows faith, which is something all parents should have in their children. I've now been president of the Royal Academy for almost three years. My father would have been tremendously proud of the royal aspect, but he would have been keen to make sure my shoes were very, very polished.

*The Royal Academy's Summer Exhibition 2014 runs until August 17*