

JOHN HOYLAND

Michael Field, The world famous artist from Totley, Sheffield Telegraph,
12 January 1980

WHEN Sheffield art student John Hoyland painted his first abstract picture his father was not impressed.

"What the hell's that?" he asked. "It looks like the middle of an explosion!"

John, who was then living at home with his parents at Totley, was not deterred and went on painting abstracts, which is just as well. Today he is one of the leading British painters in this field and has an international reputation.

He has pictures in public collections all over the world, from the Museum of Modern Art in Teheran to the Tate Gallery in London. He has had one-man exhibitions in London, New York, Milan, Lisbon, Munich and many other countries.

And next month he has his first one-man exhibition in his home city of Sheffield — the city where he went to school in Abbeydale, where he completed his early training at the College of Art and where his parents, Mr and Mrs John Hoyland of Mickley Lane, Totley, still live.

The Sheffield galleries promise that John's huge, vivid canvases, some 12ft long, will set their rooms alight.

Whether Sheffield viewers will be inflamed with enthusiasm will depend very much on their feelings about abstract painting — for John's pictures are resolutely abstract.

Critics describing his works use words like zest, vitality, grandeur, excitement, symphonic. They have been called "searingly marvellous extravaganza of colour."

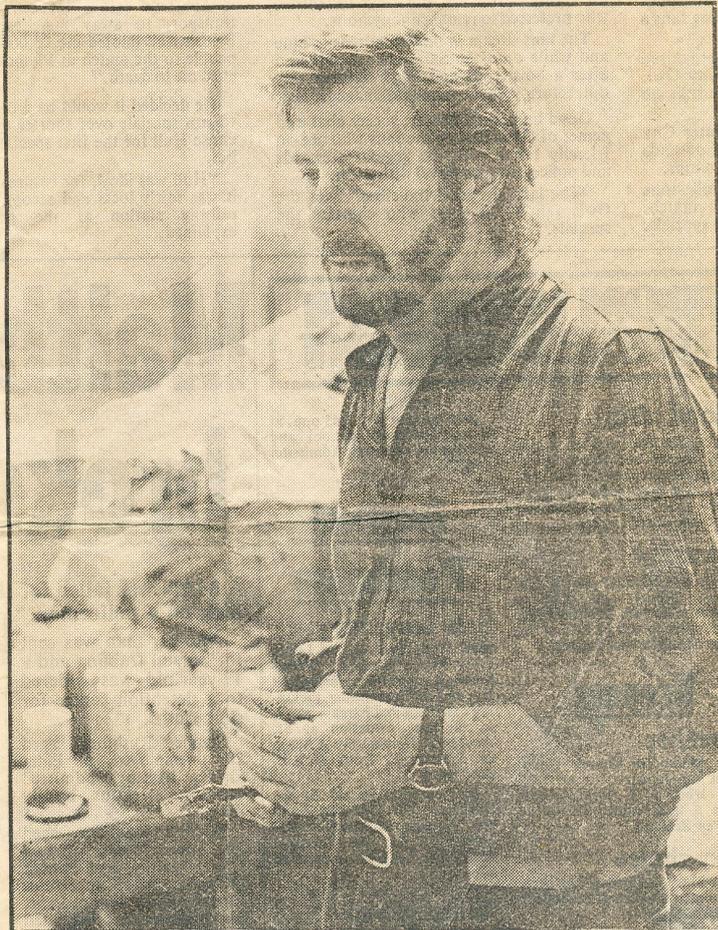
John, who is shortly setting off for Australia — he is to be artist in residence at Melbourne University until the end of April — produces his paintings either in his small studio flat a few hundred yards north of Regents Park, London, or in another studio near Devizes in Wiltshire.

He does not believe that abstract art is any great problem these days. "The idea that it is inaccessible, that it can't reach people is nonsense," he says. But he does insist that spectators have to make some effort themselves.

"Most people who have prejudices about painting don't know anything about art," he says. They haven't spent time looking at paintings, as you have to if you

The world famous artist from Totley

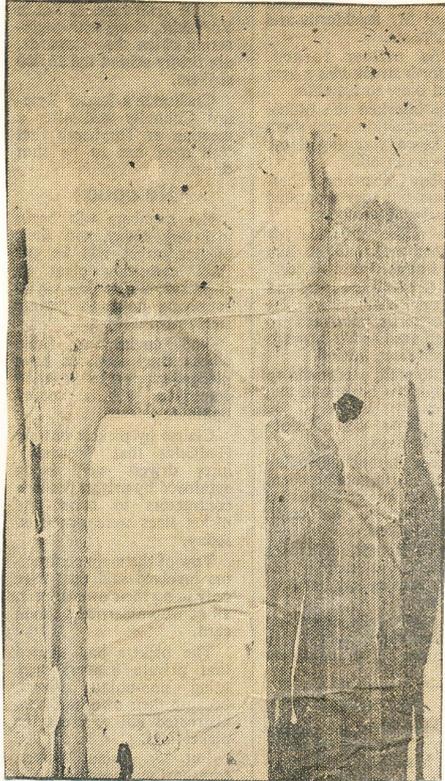
12.1.1980
Saturday



John Hoyland

want to understand what they are all about.

"Even to enjoy football or horse racing you have to spend time and effort and get to know the rules, otherwise you won't understand the finer points and subtleties."



Some of his paintings take three or four months to complete. His large work in the current British Art Show in Sheffield — called "Wotan" — took "a heck of a time", he says.

Painting for him is never an easy process. Occasionally he finishes a picture in five or six four-hour sessions but other times things don't go so well.

"Then" he says, "I keep going in and out of the studio, making cups of coffee and sneaking back in, hoping to surprise the painting."

"Sometimes I am all dressed up to go out and I pop into the studio for a quick look and end up with paint on my good shoes."

He admits that not all his paintings are a success. "I keep working on the terrible paintings till they are not terrible any more. Some still end up totally awful — but often the failures are the seeds of good paintings."

When John was a student at Sheffield he says he was completely hostile to abstract art. "I couldn't see that a picture by Mondrian, for example, was good for anything but a tablecloth design."

But gradually his views changed. "I realised that one could simplify in painting. I saw it was not about photography or copying, it was about translating. I saw that paintings were autonomous

things, independent of the subject."

At one time he regularly painted landscapes and still-life and portraits and in the tiny lounge of his London flat is a self-portrait done when he was a student at Sheffield. He compares it with a photograph of his son Jeremy, a student at Oxford, and is pleased if you see a similarity.

Is Jeremy going to be a painter? "No, thank goodness" he says. He is studying economics and engineering.

One question that may occur to visitors to the Mappin Gallery next month is why John paints so large.

"I like small paintings but I find them very hard to do," he says. "Colour gains new meaning on a large scale. When it can envelop the spectator it is much more powerful."

From Sheffield College of Art — John remembers the "fantastic draughtsmanship" of one of his tutors, Eric Johns — he went to the Royal Academy where he was the first Sheffield student to gain a full grant.

Since then, painting, teaching and travelling have occupied all his time. He has spent a considerable time in the United States and in 1978, was artist in residence at the Studio School in New York. He has travelled in South America and the Caribbean and many other countries.

Formerly principal lecturer at the Chelsea School of Art in London, he has also been visiting lecturer at St Martin's and the Royal Academy School and now teaches one day a week at the Slade (where, he wryly recalls, he was refused admission as a student before going to the Royal Academy).

He is endlessly busy — too much so at the moment he says. As well as getting ready for Australia, he has been choosing paintings for this year's major London exhibition, the Hayward Annual, preparing for a summer school he is conducting at Banff in Canada and arranging for the despatch of some of his own works for a show in New York this autumn.

In addition to all that, he is moving studio — he and 11 other artists have bought three buildings near Smithfield Market and are having them converted.

John occasionally comes to Sheffield where his parents are naturally proud of his world-wide fame. His father, a retired tailor's shop manager, long ago changed his mind about those abstract paintings.

"I am not going to say I like everything he paints," he says, "but most of them are absolutely magnificent and some are breath-taking."

Now — from February 2 to March 2 at the Mappin Gallery, Sheffield is to see a representative selection of John Hoyland's paintings. It is certainly about time.

Michael Field

12.1.80 Saturday

The world famous artist from Totley