

JOHN HOYLAND

Livingstone Marco, Doggedness, chutzpah and resilience,
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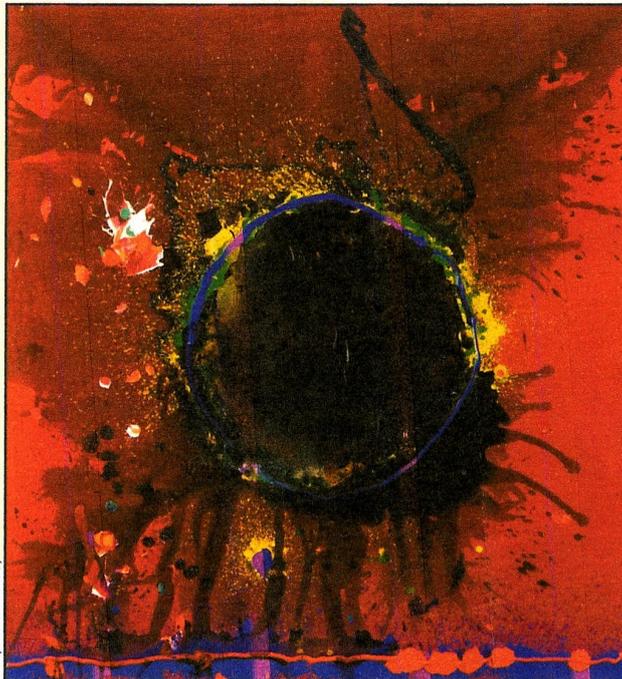
Doggedness, chutzpah and resilience

A monograph on John Hoyland, based on conversations with the artist

In the half-century since John Hoyland first established his reputation with bold, large-scale abstract paintings, he has steadfastly evolved an identifiable personal language while steering clear of dogma. That he has remained consistently in the public eye is itself testament to the doggedness, chutzpah, energy and resilience of the man and his work.

Hoyland's recent paintings, so much freer and more intuitive than the work for which he was first known, assault the viewer like a force of nature. With their suggestions of things witnessed and experienced, they demand a surrender to the senses that sidesteps rational thinking. To write about them, therefore, demands a degree of sustained ingenuity, particularly if one is to avoid the trap of just waxing lyrical. Andrew Lambirth has risen to the challenge with a torrent of precisely chosen adjectives to describe, as vividly as this language will allow, not just what the paintings look like—which we can see for ourselves from the succulent colour reproductions—but also how it feels to be in their presence and what they communicate about sensory experiences, in particular the artist's urge to convey his immersion in the natural world.

Lambirth conveys well the "joy, passion and wonderment" of Hoyland's pictures, but his enthusiasm comes close to derailing him in the last of his 15 short chapters, in which he compares the paintings made by



John Hoyland, *Blind Sun*, 2008

this artist in his 60s and 70s with the towering achievements of Beethoven's late string quartets and Titian's old-age style. However pleasing and bold Hoyland's earthy, sexual, devil-may-care improvisations, it is unfair to expect them to withstand this degree of hero worship.

Though the book concentrates on the past decade of Hoyland's production, not wishing to cover the same ground as Mel Gooding's two monographs,

informed the colour schemes and imagery of these paintings, provides essential background information. So, too, do the digressions about Hoyland's friendships with other artists including Terry Frost and Anthony Caro, the analysis of his slightly combative relationship with the American critic Clement Greenberg, and the discussion of his debts to the abstract expressionists and more recently to Joan Miró. Having rediscovered Miró through a book given to him by the American painter Robert Motherwell, Hoyland remarks: "If Miró needed outside stimulation then who am I to think I can keep on developing through a kind of formalist grid? That opened me up to plundering nature."

This is a very conversational book, much of it taken up by the artist's own words from interviews, lectures and articles. Hoyland's effusiveness, humour, observational wit and openness have gradually insinuated themselves into the freedom of his paintings. The poetic suggestiveness of the titles he now favours confirms the gleeful release from self-restrictions that have marked his evolution, so ably conveyed in this respectful, accessible and handsomely produced volume. **Marco Livingstone**
Author of *Peter Blake: One Man Show*, 2009

□ Andrew Lambirth, *John Hoyland: Scatter the Devils* (Unicorn Press), 160 pp, £40 (hb) ISBN 9781906509071