

**John Hull:**  
**The *King Lear* Series**

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# **John Hull: The *King Lear* Series**

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## Introduction

In many senses, John Hull is an old-fashioned artist; he paints mostly from nature, is concerned with the moral implications of his work, and is for the most part unaffected by the deconstructive tactics of media-oriented artists. Nevertheless, the aesthetic distancing in his scenes of war and violence lends the work an eerie, undeniably modern quality. Undeniable, too, is the great impact and mystery of these paintings.

This exhibition and catalogue were made possible through the involvement and generosity of many people. I would like to thank Miles Manning of Grace Borgenicht Gallery, New York, for his assistance throughout the exhibition. Thanks are due, also, to the collectors who agreed to loan paintings; to Barbara Hinde, who assiduously transcribed a taped interview with the artist; to Laurie Dahlberg, who edited the transcript; to my assistants; Lisa Bergant, Mary Statzer, Chris Romang, Teresa Downey and Laura Anderson, who helped in all phases of the exhibition's preparation and installation; to Jeanne Blines, who kept it all secure; to Rhondal McKinney, for scheduling the exhibition; and to Paul Anderson, who helped to make the color plates in this catalogue a possibility. Finally, I would like to thank John Hull, whose spirit, compassion and vision have been a great inspiration to me, and to others who have seen his work in the course of this exhibition.

Barry Blinderman, Director  
University Galleries  
November, 1987



*Flight of the Prodigal*, 1986



# An Interview with John Hull

by Barry Blinderman

*How did the KING LEAR series evolve?*

It came right after I did a series of paintings in 1984, based on the life of King Saul, in the Old Testament. Those paintings were really precursors to *Lear*. I had always wanted to do *Lear*, as a story that I'd really responded to from my childhood. I remember my father reading it to me. He read history to us, he read plays, Dickens — all kinds of things, and he is without a doubt the most important influence I've ever had. I remember *Lear* very vividly, and misunderstood it for a long time, and I've continued to go back to it.

*What do you feel your misunderstanding was?*

For example, toward the end of the play, after Gloucester has been blinded, his son Edgar finds him wandering around on the heath and says, "Look, Dad, we've got to get out of here, we're in danger in this place," and his father says, "No further sir, a man may rot even here." And Edgar says to him, "What, in ill thoughts again? Men must endure their going hence even as their coming hither; Ripeness is all." That is such a clear statement of what man's part is — that man must endure. Man's pride is his fidelity to his limits. I always thought that was special.

When I was doing these paintings I wanted to find that line again — "their going hence even as their coming hither," but what I'd never noticed in all the readings I'd made of it was that the scene doesn't end there. The scene ends with the father replying to his son "And that's true, too." meaning that even as it's true that "men must endure their going hence even as their coming hither," it's also true that "a man may rot even here." That's the remarkable thing about Shakespeare — that he doesn't give an easy way out. As



*Far From God, 1986*





*Resting Place, 1986*

beautiful as that statement is, he's not going to leave you with that, he's not going to make it easy on you, because that's really the choice that man has. Man's choice is to endure in this world, to accept it as it is, or to just give up and quit.

I think my paintings have a moral basis, but I'm not trying to teach a lesson — these aren't allegories. Their meaning comes from an accumulation of detail, an accumulation of incidence. There isn't a lesson at the end of these and I don't really think there is with Shakespeare, either. I'm calling attention to the world around me and trying to understand it somehow, and that's what drew me to *Lear*. It's a great story, a story about soldiers, and I'm interested in soldiers. It's a story about devotion and about morality and betrayal and suffering and joy and all the things that make up human life.

*These are actually the same concerns in the story of King Saul. It occurred to me why you would do a Lear series after a Saul series. They're both falling from grace. Saul dies in battle when he falls on his sword intentionally because he realizes that without God's grace, he's a dead man. The light of God is already out of his eyes. There's a real connection between the two men.*

Oh, absolutely. Saul is another case of a great man with feet of clay. The beauty of it is that he goes on believing in God. The characters that I've always chosen — whether they are related to me or have come from newspaper stories or from literature — are all human beings who endure somehow the grief and misfortune and injustice inherent in the living of life.

*Both Saul and Lear have a revelation. I think both men die changed.*

I always found that very interesting. Saul's fatal transgression was that he didn't kill every woman and child in the village. It's fascinating. He is denied God's guidance because of that transgression, yet David, Saul's successor sends a woman's husband off and has



# Catalogue of the Exhibition

*Resting Place*, 1986

acrylic on canvas

48" x 72"

collection of Mr. and Mrs. Steven Roth,  
Ridgewood, NY

*Sand in the Wind*, 1985

acrylic on canvas

36" x 48"

collection of Mr. Larry Gagosian, New  
York, NY

*The Hill at Night*, 1986

acrylic on canvas

40" x 50"

collection of Mr. Jesse Siegel, New  
York, NY

*West of the Fields*, 1986

acrylic on canvas

36" x 48"

collection of Caroline and Stephen  
Adler, New York, NY

*Some Do Not*, 1986

acrylic on canvas

48" x 60"

collection of Mr. Jonathan Tisch, New  
York, NY

*The Dogs Among the Bushes*, 1986

acrylic on canvas

48" x 60"

courtesy of Grace Borgenicht Gallery,  
New York, NY

*Farewell the Trumpets*, 1986

acrylic on canvas

48" x 72"

courtesy of Grace Borgenicht Gallery,  
New York, NY

*Mad Tom*, 1986

acrylic on canvas

36" x 48"

courtesy of Grace Borgenicht Gallery,  
New York, NY

*Flight of the Prodigal*, 1986

acrylic on canvas

42" x 60"

collection of Mr. Paul Anderson, Chi-  
cago, IL

*The Shape of Things*, 1986

acrylic on canvas

48" x 60"

collection of Ms. Margarete Schultz,  
Great Neck, NY

*Beyond the River*, 1986

acrylic on canvas

40" x 48"

courtesy of Grace Borgenicht Gallery,  
New York, NY

*Bred to a Harder Thing*, 1986

acrylic on canvas

48" x 72"

courtesy of Grace Borgenicht Gallery,  
New York, NY

*The Children of Wingate*, 1986

acrylic on canvas

42" x 60"

courtesy of Grace Borgenicht Gallery,  
New York, NY

*Cross Roads*, 1986

acrylic on canvas

42" x 60"

courtesy of Grace Borgenicht Gallery,  
New York, NY

*Far From God*, 1986

acrylic on canvas

36" x 48"

collection of Prudential Life Insurance  
Company of America, Newark, NJ