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- 1 There are plenty of critics who started out as artists, but rather fewer artists who enjoy any success as critics or historians. John Golding (1928-2012) excelled in several different fields at once: as author of a standard work on cubism (1959) and of a prizewinning collection of essays on the pioneers of abstraction (*Paths to the Absolute*, 2002); as occasional contributor to the New York Review of Books and The Burlington Magazine; as the teacher of a couple of generations of art historians at the Courtauld Institute and of painters at the Royal College of Art; and as ground-breaking curator of exhibitions of work by Léger, Picasso and Matisse. All his criticism was informed by his artistic vision, yet his art has itself been unjustifiably overlooked until recently. This volume, produced with the support of the artist's estate, is the first substantial monograph on John Golding the painter and contains essays by three of his distinguished colleagues and former students, Dawn Ades, David Anfam and Christopher Green, as well as an interview with his curatorial collaborator and former student, Elizabeth Cowling.
- 2 The painter, John Golding, first came to the fore in the 1970s, when he joined the Rowan Gallery stable, with its hard-edge painters such as Bridget Riley and Paul Huxley, abstract sculptors, Anthony Caro and Phillip King, and (in transitional mode) Michael Craig-Martin and Barry Flanagan. However, his earlier corpus of figurative work, strongly influenced by Surrealism and the Mexican muralists, remained virtually unknown – if only, because it did not fit in comfortably with what was going on in Britain at the time. As Dawn Ades makes clear in her essay, Golding's upbringing in North America predisposed him towards something entirely different, though his early exposure to the American Abstract Expressionists in the late 1940s was a harbinger of things to come. Disconcertingly, David Anfam attributes to John Golding the same dichotomy that Golding himself (in *Paths to the Absolute*) had detected in Jackson Pollock, between his “search for self and longing to identify with the absolute” (p. 171).
- 3 Golding's spell with the Rowan Gallery and the international commercial network it provided was relatively short, as was his adherence to a relatively programmatic approach to abstraction. By 1981, he was successful enough as an artist to exchange his

role as an art history teacher for that of a painter and teacher of painting. In the third and last period of his evolution as a painter, in the 1980s and 1990s, he worked increasingly for himself and achieved great fluency in his handling of oil paints and, especially, pastels, in which he excelled. These reveal in a new feeling for light and space. The armature which holds the fluid elements in tension provides a distant echo of the human frame and a scarcely veiled allusion to the landscapes of Cézanne. The physicality of the gestural painting pulls the viewer “up and into” the pictorial space (Green). Here, for the first time is a publication that brings together John Golding’s achievement as an artist with critical commentary that is worthy of it.