

his own work, a strategy reinforced by his response to works by Rembrandt, Goya, Cezanne, Bonnard and the other masters he saw in Ottawa and New York.<sup>3</sup> While his early works are rooted in the tradition of post-impressionist and early modern figurative painting, they nevertheless display a roughness that acknowledges the limitations of the tradition and prophesies ways his work will be developed.

The attitude and work of Borduas and the Automatistes stood at an opposite pole to Roberts' restraint; however, Ewen became interested in them and by 1950 had begun participating in discussions held at Borduas' studio at Saint-Hilaire. That year he exhibited his work with theirs at an *Exposition des Rebelles* held to protest the decision of the jury for the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts' Annual Spring Exhibition. The jury had rejected all works by Borduas and the group around him,<sup>4</sup> confronting issues that undoubtedly were aesthetic, for the Automatistes' work had an energy that approached abandon, developing as it did more from the spontaneous expression of unconscious realms of the mind than from the reasoned decision of eye and hand; but the issues were also intellectual, for the *Refus Global* had released political and moral matters into the realm of art.

Stimulated by the discoveries of the Automatistes and the Abstract Expressionists, whose work he saw in New York, Ewen began to experiment more aggressively with the manipulation of form and colour, and soon found that the figurative element was unnecessary for his painting. His work began to spring directly from a personal search for a type of painting that would bring together his knowledge of the figurative and automatiste traditions, allowing the freedom of gesture without forfeiting the order of composition. That concern seems illustrated by most of the works from 1955 to 1958.

From 1959 to 1970 Ewen's works developed through series, each series issuing from different preoccupations and each having internal variations. Such generalized notions as "freedom of gesture" or "order of composition" can be understood in the early work, but become impossible to relate to the series works. Even the words of the phrases are given new ramifications.

It could be argued that "gesture" is important to the *Untitled 1962* (Cat. 19) inasmuch as texture, a function of gesture, is used to form the compositional device. But texture, the same colour as the ground, operates as drawing; it results more directly from the action of the eye than the hand. Gesture is, in fact, peripheral to the major concern of the work,