

Paterson Ewen

Considering the amount of attention that has been given to Paterson Ewen's work during the last few years, it is interesting to note that, despite his earlier recognition in Montreal, it has only been since 1973 when he had his fourth one-man exhibition in Toronto that the Ontario art establishment has begun to acknowledge his importance. In 1969, reviewing Ewen's second one-man exhibition in Toronto, Barry Lord wrote that he was "still hardly known to the Toronto art public," an observation that was slightly modified to "he's still somewhat unknown" by another reviewer in 1972.¹ At any rate, it is obvious from the number of times the recent works have been shown and discussed, that they are known and respected, and that it is time to show a sampling of his early work.

Despite the varieties of image with which he has been preoccupied, despite the different techniques he has used for painting, there are qualities which, characterizing all the work, suggest the consistency of Ewen's stance as a painter. Rejecting theory-based painting, he has chosen to deal with immediate, intuitive visual decisions in his work. The result is that the paintings, even when they are figurative, stress self-signals (they find their meaning in the way they are, in what they look like). George Kubler wrote that self-signals are "mute existential declarations of things;"² these paintings are declarations of themselves.

In 1948, when Ewen left McGill after having studied for two years in a general arts programme, to study painting at the school of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, the Montreal art world saw the founding of the *Prisme d'yeux* group around Pellan, the dissolution of John Lyman's Contemporary Art Society following the election of Borduas as president, and Borduas' publication of the *Refus Global*. Montreal was writing its own art history, and it was proving to be the most important chapter in the history of contemporary painting in Canada.

Ewen studied with Goodridge Roberts from 1948 to 1950. As a student, Roberts had read Roger Fry and in 1948 was still committed to a painting that expressed sensitive, significant composition. The traditional subjects—still life, figure studies, landscape and interior scenes—were used as the raw material from which the artist developed a cosmic sense of order through measured brush strokes, colour harmonies and intuitive design. The model of Roberts' painting provided the strategy by which Ewen approached