

JOHNSON: In the new paintings there are some small pieces of metal, as hail in *Hail on Coastline* and ice in *Iceberg*, but there are no chains, no coco-matting. It has come down mostly to plywood and paint made to work in great sympathy by a great deal of gouging. Down to this coalescence to use the meteorological term for the forming of rain in clouds up to the point of falling. What do you think brought this about?

EWEN: All of the pieces in the first exhibition at Carmen's of this more or less ecological work, phenomena pictures, were hand gouged. But then a friend in Toronto said, I have an electrical router and why don't you try that. I was a little suspicious, I still had the old almost academic idea - well, I don't know about machinery you know. But he said borrow my router and try it and if it suits you you can buy it. Which is what happened. As soon as I started to use it I found that by this method of kneeling down with it I could really draw quite freely with it. And that is how the next exhibition came about, the recent exhibition of weather coastline paintings.

JOHNSON: Coastlines. Were you thinking of particular coastlines when you did these works?

EWEN: The coastlines of the new paintings I got from a very peculiar book. It is a Japanese marine book and it is tied together with string like shoelaces. And I like to see people come up and look at the coastline pieces and say, oh, that's certainly the coast of British Columbia,

or that so looks like the coast of Nova Scotia. In fact I have always since I was a boy had a penchant for things Japanese. There was a coincidence. We happened to meet the secretary to the Japanese ambassador one time when he was in Montreal, and he came to dinner at our house. And he brought gifts for each of us. Something for my mother, chocolates for my sister I remember, and whiskey for my father which was very appropriate, and appropriate though I didn't realize how much, he gave me a book on Hiroshige. You know we have different books when we are boys and this is one I liked a lot and kept going back to. It deals with coastlines and with islands and with rain. And you know the Japanese artist's method was to go out into the rain or to observe a tree or a bird or a flower or a wave but he would never try to depict it then. He would simply observe it and when he had captured enough of it in all levels of his being, then he would go back and do it.

So it has all sort of come around, the phenomena part and the weather part and these early loves and interests. And I think this brings us about up to date with my new paintings. They are more weather as such. And in terms of materials I think you can write it down mostly to that large sheet of plywood worked upon with the router. Kneeling in the middle of the painting with that gouging machine. It was like an exercise, a physical exercise in almost an oriental position. This being in the center of the work instead of standing up opposite it is so much a part of the process. Although this only

struck me after I found myself doing it.

JOHNSON: Yes that must be a reason for the sense of space, I mean of earth, of troposphere. Of a place where there is rain.

EWEN: Yes it is rain coming down on the expanse of the water, on the islands, it is also coming at you at various velocities and densities, up as well as down. I enjoyed that one.

JOHNSON: We have hardly mentioned the other new paintings such as that long scroll of rain, *Coastal Trip*, and *Hail on Coastline* which is really much different.

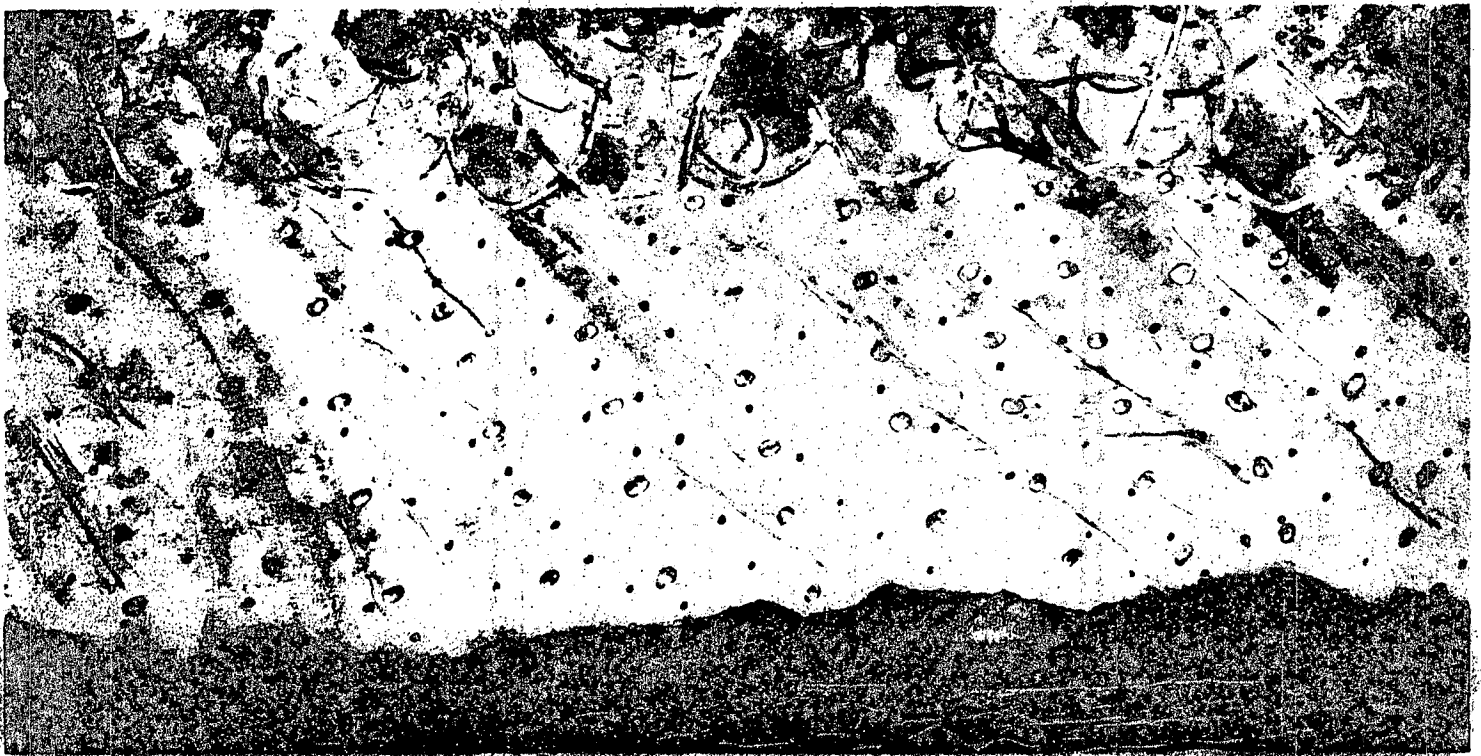
EWEN: Yes it has a strange serenity. As if you could stop the hail process and look at it and examine it.

JOHNSON: But that is more like hail.

EWEN: Yes it is more what hail feels like because hail is of course concentric circles.

JOHNSON: Yes it is an onion I read.

*Rain Over Water with its big white grey painted rain making sky and grey ocean and brown ochre islands of rain receiving earth is rain. Its green blue line is the horizon of rain. It is the dark slanting gorges cutting sky into strips, cutting dark into light, of rain, the writing of rain. Rain falls and spreads on your forehead, right then, before it becomes something else, the beginning and growing rain. It is rain dark as it comes and light with your perception of it, the knowledge of rain. Rain full from its coalescing fall and filling you with rising, the power of rain. It is initiation rain, rain of the song: I want rain. It is the word rain and it is rain.*



*Hail on Coastline*, 1974  
acrylic and aluminum on plywood,  
65" x 120"