

abstraction that had been his preoccupation for fifteen years, as well as the machine-clean surfaces that his hard edge work demanded, and began to experiment with completely new techniques of painting.

First, he made two works by dipping pieces of felt in paint, using them to print dots on white canvases—*Traces Through Space* (Cat. 30). The halting lines traced by ragged dots parody the fast lines and precise dashes of the previous year. He had thought of the *Life Stream with Time Intervals* series as representing "some sort of phenomena, as traces of something going through space;" these new dot paintings even more strongly suggested "an imagery that touched on the sciences," leading him to submit to what he calls his disease for old illustrated dictionaries and encyclopedia and laymen's books on the physical sciences in the search for subject matter. Soon he had painted a series of rough works on canvas that showed such physical phenomena as rain, clouds generating electricity, an artesian well, and a drop of water skimming across a heated surface.

Although liberated by these new figurative works, Ewen found canvas and stretchers and brushes to be limiting and decided to make a woodcut, gouging lines to represent a *Solar Eclipse* (Cat. 35) in a sheet of plywood. He realized almost as soon as he began the work that he was doing the work, not a block for a print. Experimentation with technique of painting expanded to include experimentation with materials, resulting at first in three wood and metal constructions (*Thunder Chain*, *How Lightning Worked in 1925*, and *Rocks Moving in the Current of a Stream*) and leading to the incorporation of various materials in the gouged plywood panels.

During the early 1970's rumours were circulated about the death of painting by people who could not accept the superficiality of the Modernist aesthetic. In a tremendous burst of energy, Ewen began to play with everything he had learned about painting, developing a strategy for work that allowed "constant decision making; real, intuitive decision making because you come up with more or less random effects that are beautiful in themselves."⁶ The surfaces of the paintings on wood are crowded with decisions made. The wood is a material for drawing in with a router and on with paint and felt markers, and a surface for painting on (the image) and over (runs of paint), while the added materials, completing their function as image, are restored to their essence as things.