

du phénomène. Le vécu de l'édifice est à peine esquissé.

La dernière partie de l'ouvrage nous présente 38 monographies. Comme nous l'avons déjà souligné, il aurait été intéressant d'expliquer le choix de ces églises. Quels sont les critères de sélection? L'autre problème réside dans la description. L'auteur décrit l'édifice, en plan, selon les effets voulus par l'architecte. Mais, là encore, nous ne savons pas comment le monde ordinaire réagit à l'architecture. L'église est-elle simplement un monument ou bien un édifice ayant une vie propre? Toutes ces questions sont présentes à notre esprit.

Dans cette optique, l'ouvrage de Claude Bergeron devient le premier jalon pour comprendre le phénomène de cette architecture méconnue. Il devrait servir à pousser la réflexion et l'analyse. Tous les commentaires que nous avons faits ne doivent pas être pris négativement. Et, en tant qu'historien de l'architecture, je me dois de dire bravo à Claude Bergeron pour son ouvrage.

Jean Bélisle
Université Concordia

Paterson Ewen: The Montreal Years

Matthew TEITELBAUM

Mendel Art Gallery, Saskatoon, 1987
47 pp., 18 col., 21 b/w illus., \$15.00

Paterson Ewen: Painting 1971-1987

Phenomena

Philip MONK

Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, 1987
112 pp., 42 col., 25 b/w illus., \$25.00

Although these two very different treatments of Paterson Ewen do complement each other to some degree, taken together they do not form a definitive text on this remarkable artist. Both catalogues are serious, scholarly works and reflect much thought on the part of their respective authors, but neither conveys nor reflects the tremendous passion and power of Paterson Ewen's art. One still has to go back to Doris Shadbolt's 1977 Vancouver Art Gallery catalogue to read an essay about Ewen which strikes the appropriate tone. Given the continuing interest in Ewen's production, however, it seems likely there will be more publications on him to come, and neither of these current catalogues bears the heavy burden of being the last word on this unique artist.

These comprehensive, double exhibitions in 1987 are unusual given our customary rejection of, and amnesia towards, senior artists in Canada. This reversal of the norm seems to imply that at the age of 62, Ewen still has something to say to a national audience. It is difficult to pinpoint, however, what it is about his painting which gives it this touchstone quality. But the younger generation of Canadian painters who began using imagery in the 1970's and 1980's look to Ewen as a role model and inspiring "grandfather" figure. He moved from abstraction to representation

in 1970, years before New Image came into vogue. In this sense, Ewen is a Canadian counterpart to Philip Guston in the United States.

Ewen straddles both Canadian art history, with his 1940 and 50's Montreal work, and contemporary Canadian art, with his "phenomoscapes" from the 1970's and 80's. It makes sense (as it would not for many other artists) to have two separate exhibitions of these periods. Matthew Teitelbaum takes a traditional approach as his methodology. He includes large amounts of biographical material in his *Chronology*, much of this culled from the numerous personal interviews he conducted as part of his research. His essay itself is largely a formal analysis of Ewen's paintings. Philip Monk, in contrast, gives no sense he has ever met Ewen or any of his associates. He presents his own view of Ewen's work, based solely on his engagement with that *oeuvre*, concentrating on the artist's working methods and use of materials: "the means by which the works signify."

Teitelbaum's catalogue is a valuable contribution to the published literature on Canadian art for the wealth of raw data provided in his *Chronology*. It includes, for instance, small quotations from and complete listings of reviews and articles on the artist during the Montreal period. Unfortunately his essay is less successful. Here he attempts a stylistic analysis of the paintings, but to the exclusion of any other sort of discussion. The reader never gains a sense of immediacy of the period which, with its tremendous authoritarian repression and ferment of artistic rebellion, is not difficult to convey! Nor does the reader gain any insight into Ewen as a person and the reasons for his various artistic and existential decisions. Why, for instance, did the production of easel painting begin to seem empty and meaningless to Ewen in the 1960's? Could it

have been in part due to the changes in Quebec culture and the depoliticization of art? As well, no attempt is made to evaluate the paintings from these years of Ewen's career, either as a group, or individually, one against the other. Are they really any good, and if so, why? What was Ewen's critical view of his own work—did some dissatisfaction with the quality of his painting also add to his disenchantment with his production in the 1960's?

Teitelbaum's writing on the pictures sometimes slides into the unintelligible. For example, discussing *Citadel, Quebec* (1947), and *Landscape with Monastery* (1947) he says "the repeated application of layers reveals an agitated surface." (p.9) Later, in discussing *Untitled* (1954) he writes: "A strong organic sense of placement and coloration is suggested in the blockish forms which hover in foreground space." (p.19) A reader wonders what an organic sense of placement and organic colour are, and how these can be suggested by forms. No discussion of Ewen's content is made, and in fact, seems to have been purposely avoided. In bringing up the art produced by the Russian avant garde, for instance, Teitelbaum restricts his discussion specifically to formal qualities in the work which may have interested and influenced Ewen. However, he does not discuss the meaning in, for example, the work of Malevich. One further criticism is probably on the level of a pet peeve, but Teitelbaum uses the terms "experimental" and "experimentation" repeatedly to describe Ewen's artistic activity. This always implies to me a kind of disinterested, dilettante stance, that of someone dabbling to see what will happen, rather than the completely engaged and committed sense of restless exploration which I associate with an artist like Paterson Ewen.

Philip Monk has carefully considered the post 1970 *oeuvre* of Ewen, and at the

same time the topics he wished to discuss in his catalogue. Setting Ewen in a context of other artists emphasizing their own bodies in the art making process, and the materiality of their work in the late 1960's and early 1970's, Monk concentrates almost solely on these aspects of Ewen's art. He plays down the importance of Ewen's imagery, avoiding a discussion of content in which, with Ewen's art, admittedly, it is difficult not to become fulsome. Monk insists that the development of all his work proceeds from Ewen's achievements in having his quirky materials *become* natural phenomena. (p.27) The inexplicable transformation—in which the viewer participates—as, for example, a section of chain link fence becomes fog, seems to be the main, if not only, point of fascination in Ewen's work for Monk. As a result, his essay is written at an emotional distance from Ewen's work and from a fairly analytical standpoint. This approach would seem to be antithetical to the kind of visceral and spiritual response most people have to the work and which Ewen seems to share in its creation. Is it appropriate in an essay on any artist to divide the working means from the activity of representation and to refuse to discuss the associative meaning of the images? Monk writes that, like Pollock, Ewen was trying to overcome an alienation from the natural world in his turning to new materials and working methods in 1970. He feels that it is these aspects of Ewen's work which helped him overcome this alienation, not his choice of imagery. In my opinion, these two factors are interwoven and cannot be severed or placed in order of importance.

Neither author, in the end, seems to have penetrated to the heart of Ewen's art. As a result, his work has not been wonderfully served in either treatment. But, certainly both these exhibitions, as they travel across the country, are important since they make

a comprehensive selection of Ewen's work available to the public. In terms of their scholarship (in compiling bibliographies, locating and dating works, etc.) both these curators have produced top quality work. The design of both exhibition catalogues, while elegant and tasteful in each case, tends, however, to override the reproduction of the paintings. In both publications there are inexplicably (even ridiculously) tiny reproductions of paintings scattered throughout. The approach taken in the essays may not seem to me the most appropriate in either case, but both present coherently argued positions and convey solid information. Nevertheless, an essay which can take its place alongside the work of Paterson Ewen, sharing its intensity, spiritual, chthonic content and which sets him in context in the tradition of Canadian art, has yet to be written.

Liz Wylie
Freelance art critic
Toronto