

On Ewen's Moons

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## ABSTRACT

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Geraldine Davis

Paterson Ewen's gouged plywood moonscapes are not landscapes in the tradition of the genre as it has been understood. A discussion of the landscape traditions and their implications provides a framework for the notion that his large-scale, rigorously executed works create the viewer's physical experience of the Moon in space. This experience is imaginative but palpable. "On Ewen's Moons" explores the viewer's interaction with Ewen's works in the context of Merleau-Ponty's thoughts on perception along with contemporary notions of visual memory. A detailed analysis of six major works from the artist's Moon series forms the centerpiece to this discussion. Set against the historical events of the Apollo lunar landing, Ewen's visceral Moon images are examined in the context of our contemporary awareness of outer space.

## Table of Contents

List of Figures .....	v
Chapter 1: Introduction/ Overview .....	1
James D. Campbell, Philip Monk and Teitelbaum on Ewen .....	3
Landscape Traditions and Implications .....	6
The Sublime Landscape .....	9
Changing Notions of the Landscape .....	13
Beyond Landscape .....	16
Chapter 2: Experiential Content: Capturing the Rain .....	18
Evolution in Beliefs about Experience .....	18
Mystical/Spiritual Experience of Nature in Art: Historical	
Background to Ewen .....	20
Movement and Space Reveal Mysticism in Carr's Later Works .....	23
Physical Intimacy in Rothko and Ewen .....	25
Experience and Process Become Imagery .....	30
Mystery, Perception and Wonder in Ewen's Works .....	31
The Response to Visual Images .....	36
Merleau-Ponty and Contemporary Thought on Perception .....	39
Chapter 3: On The Moon.....	41
Touching the Moon: Historical Context .....	42
Extra-Terrestrial Awareness .....	46

Details and Scale to Create Experience of the Moon .....	58
Transformation of Material: Ewen's Hand-made Space .....	62
The Uninhabited Moon – Last Wilderness .....	69
Works Cited .....	74
Appendix .....	78

## List of Figures

Works by Paterson Ewen:

Fig. 1. Cloud over Water (1979), acrylic and metal on gouged plywood, 224 x 335 cm, Art Gallery on Ontario, plate 28 in Paterson Ewen: Phenomena Paintings, 1971-1987 (72).

Fig. 2. Halley's Comet as Seen by Giotto (1979), acrylic and fluorescent paint on galvanized steel and gouged plywood, 229 x 244 cm, Art Gallery on Ontario, from Paterson Ewen (5).

Fig. 3. Gibbous Moon (1980), acrylic on gouged plywood, 228.6 x 243.8 cm, National Gallery of Canada, plate 31 in Paterson Ewen: Phenomena Paintings, 1971-1987 (75).

Fig. 4. Day Moon (1981), acrylic and metal on gouged plywood, 228.6 x 243.8 cm, Carmen Lamanna Gallery, plate 34 in Paterson Ewen: Phenomena Paintings, 1971-1987 (79).

Fig. 5. Full Moon (1984), acrylic on gouged plywood, 243.8 x 228.6 cm, collection Garth H. Drabinsky, from Paterson Ewen (40).

Fig. 6. Moon over Water I (1987), acrylic on gouged plywood, 228.6 x 335.3 cm, plate 45 in Paterson Ewen: Phenomena Paintings, 1971-1987 (93).

Fig. 7. Moon over Water II (1987), acrylic on gouged plywood, 228.6 x 243.8 cm, collection of J. Ron Longstaffe, plate 41 in Paterson Ewen: Phenomena Paintings, 1971-1987 (89).

Fig. 8. Half Moon (1987), acrylic on gouged plywood, 228.6 x 243.8 cm, collection of Half Moon Collectors, digital photo by Geoff Scott/ Blindfold courtesy of Geraldine Davis & Company Limited, Toronto.

Fig. 9. Half Moon (1987) (detail, upper right), see Fig. 8.

Fig. 10. Full Moon (1990), acrylic on gouged plywood, 236.2 x 243.8 cm digital file courtesy of

Olga Korper Gallery, Toronto from Mary Handford's slide.

Fig. 11. Eclipse of the Moon (1990), acrylic on gouged plywood, 266.8 x 297.6 cm, Art Gallery of Ontario, from Paterson Ewen (78).

Fig. 12. Eclipse of the Moon (1990) (detail) from Paterson Ewen (91), see Fig. 11.

Fig. 13. Satan's Pit, (1991), coloured steel, bolts and acrylic paint on gouged plywood, 229 x 244 cm, Art Gallery of Ontario from Paterson Ewen (80).

Photograph from Life:

Fig. 14. Life 8 August 1969. "On the Moon: Footprints and photographs by Neil Armstrong and Edwin Aldrin.": cover.

Photographs of the Moon from Full Moon. New York: Knopf, 1999. :

(Note: All caption information is quoted from the photograph's number in captions under each thumbnail in the index of photographs near back of the unpaginated book.)

Fig. 15. Full Moon. 30. "Earthrise seen for the first time by human eyes. Apollo II astronaut William Anders took this photograph...Apollo 8, December 24, 1968."

Fig. 16. Full Moon. 29 (detail). "An enlarged detail of the battered highlands of the lunar farside, seen from some 1,000 miles at the start of Apollo 16's return to Earth...Metric mapping camera black-and-white negative by Kenneth Mattingly, Apollo 16, April 16-27, 1972."

Fig. 17. Full Moon. 67 c, 67 d. "Charles Duke...in a photographic composite of Apollo 16's first moonwalk...transparencies by John Young, Apollo 16, April 16-27, 1972."

Fig. 18. Full Moon. 109. "A view of the Moon never seen before the space age, captured at about 1,000 miles as the astronauts began their trip back to Earth...by Kenneth Mattingly, Apollo 16, April 16-27, 1972."

Fig. 19. Full Moon. 23. "A half-Moon seen from the command module on the way back to earth...probably by Alfred Worden, Apollo 15, July 26-August 7, 1971."



## Chapter I

### Introduction / Overview

“Ewen paints things we cannot know empirically,” (76) wrote Matthew Teitelbaum in 1996. Canadian artist Paterson Ewen’s groundbreaking work initially suggests that the landscape was his inspiration. His works, however, are much more than landscapes. This thesis analyzes how Ewen’s paintings and constructions are explorations of how humans experience nature, through all our senses and our imagination. His works affect us more deeply than any “pure” landscape painting could. Their physical presence is both tactile and visual, delivering experiential details of any landscape, regardless of scale. With roughly delineated surfaces, Ewen seems to paint the skin of the earth, not its form; the weather, not its shape; a patch of the night sky, but never its immense entirety. The heightened sensations created by his elaborately executed works dramatically convey the spiritual awe we humans feel in the splendour of our natural universe — the earth, its waters and its heavens.

In this introductory chapter, I will touch on the landscape traditions from which Ewen departs. While focusing on Ewen’s Moon series, I expand the historical context for these works by examining the cultural impact of events surrounding the late 1960’s lunar landing in some detail. In painting the historical setting around the time of the Apollo landing, I add to the literature on Ewen while situating his plywood moonscapes somewhere beyond landscape, as it is traditionally understood.

The second chapter on experiential content sketches the historical and theoretical background for mystical/spiritual experience of nature in Ewen's work. In order to illuminate the means by which Ewen's works deliver their experiential content, I explore ideas about memory, movement and perception. In the context of mystical experience, a comparison of Ewen's works with Mark Rothko's extends the discussion of movement and perception. The last chapter on the Moon addresses Ewen's moonscapes, influences of abstract and conceptual movements in Ewen's work, as well as his execution and materials: plywood, router and paint. "On the Moon" contains a detailed analysis of the following works: Gibbous Moon (1980) (fig. 3); Full Moon (1984) (fig. 5); Half Moon (1987) (fig. 8); Eclipse of the Moon (1990) (fig. 11); Full Moon (1990) (fig. 10) and Satan's Pit, (1991) (fig. 13). The Moon chapter focuses on the impact of the historical events of lunar exploration, science and space imagery on Ewen's Moon series. Throughout these explorations, I present the notion of Ewen's 1980 and 1990 paintings of the moon in space as works that depart from their earthly landscape origins and convey experience directly to the viewer.

In this introduction, the historical background of the landscape genre is briefly examined for its appropriate application to Ewen's work. In addition to the important authors' texts on the landscape noted above and in my bibliography, several essays in Beyond Wilderness: the Group of Seven, Canadian Identity, and Contemporary Art were very useful in situating Ewen in the context of landscape art. Ann Davis's study of mysticism in Canadian artists' works provided the principal art historical basis for my discussion of mystical content in Ewen's works.

In Paterson Ewen, Ron Graham's biography traces the early influences of Goodridge Roberts at Montreal Museum of Fine Arts' school in 1948; his wife Françoise Sullivan and Les Automatistes in 1949 (16-8); and his London colleagues in 1968 (25 and 59-61). Teitelbaum's essay, together with Graham's biography, the chronology and its rich selection of critical gems and interview highlights make this book the most invaluable historical account of Ewen's work to date. Teitelbaum's discussion of Ewen's development in terms of contemporary abstract, conceptual art and landscape painting, helped me to construct the notion of Ewen's eventual departure from those traditions.

#### **James D. Campbell, Philip Monk and Teitelbaum on Ewen**

Two authors that present many of the ideas that contributed to my exploration of Ewen's moonscapes are: Philip Monk in Paterson Ewen: Phenomena 1971-1987 and James D. Campbell with Startled Wonder: The Phenomenascapes of Paterson Ewen. My investigation of Ewen's experiential content owes a great debt to Campbell's observations on Ewen's acute perception. The discussion of Ewen's unique position in relation to the Canadian landscape tradition borrows from both Monk's and Teitelbaum's astute commentaries, but it is Monk's detailed account of Ewen's materials and process that were most helpful in analyzing the plywood moonscapes.

Teitelbaum pronounces that Ewen's works "extend the experience and traditions of landscape painting in Canada" (41). Like Philip Monk, in Monk's earlier Ewen catalogue, Teitelbaum ascribes the power of the works to the interconnection between

Ewen's image and his process, but he is most interested in the development of Ewen's subject imagery: nature, specifically the landscape. Monk came closer to separating Ewen's works from the landscape genre:

“it would seem natural in retrospect to discuss his subject in relation to a national landscape tradition... As terms, “landscape” and “image” are precisely what I wish to avoid, insofar as they are traditionally conceived...we have to reconstitute the break his work made, partly by putting it into relation with other practices in art, namely the move from mimesis to semiosis, whereby material takes on a sign function in a semiotic process” (15).

Monk does an exceptional job of analyzing Ewen's process and situating it within contemporary and conceptual art-making practices. Using Robert Morris' description of Jackson Pollock's process, Monk focuses on the unusual physicality of Ewen's “attack”<sup>i</sup> (Ewen qtd. in Monk; 21). However, he is so interested in the physical process that the discussion of Ewen's content as anything more than weather or phenomena remains largely unarticulated, even less than in Teitelbaum's text. Monk does, however, clearly set Ewen apart from the landscape painting tradition that is not about nature but about “the conventions of past art and other paintings” (22) and states that Ewen's works “remain paintings, but not paintings about paintings” (22).

In this statement, Monk has identified the aspect of Ewen's works that distinguish them from that of the landscape tradition. Ewen's works are not about those painting traditions as much as they are about expressing notions of experience. The images are so readily identified as landscapes that it difficult to see that they do not

belong in the traditions of landscape painting. As I will argue throughout this paper, Ewen's works are about experience, they convey experience and that experience is not an experience of art. Examples of the northern landscape traditions that pervade modern western art in Canada are those Roald Nasgaard traces as influences on the group of Seven in The Mystic North. He reveals their origins in European thought and painting histories that idealize nature. These influences are part of a long evolution of a complex cultural pattern and have been fully explored in many more texts than the few cited in this discussion.

Teitelbaum identifies Ewen's "desire to create an experienced reality--a force of nature itself" (76-9) but like Monk, he attributes most of Ewen's power to his ability to represent nature's power through imagery and physical execution. He cannot abandon his desire to keep Ewen in the romantic landscape fold, yet he recognizes the extraordinary content of Ewen's works, without being able, or perhaps, willing to identify it: "Through a sensibility informed in part by the Romantic tradition, we are invited to engage with something outside of ordinary experience which nevertheless completes experience. The unknowable is made real, or seemingly real, in the manner of astronomy itself" (79). In that passage, he comes close to James D. Campbell's declaration of wonder as the content of Ewen's paintings (Campbell 15) just before veering off into a more logical scientific framework for Ewen's referential imagery.

Campbell dwells on the experience in Ewen's works, but concentrates, quite naturally, on Ewen's own experience, particularly Ewen's perception and the resulting experience of his wonder. He compellingly articulates Ewen's ability to create a record of his keen and original perception (50-1) through his use of what Campbell calls authentic

symbols<sup>ii</sup> (42). He stresses Ewen's source of wonder in lived experience in the real, felt world in: "how concretely this painter is grounded in the experiential" (51). He does write about the impact on the viewer: "the 'depicted scene' itself seems to extend beyond the discrete boundaries of the surface plane and becomes somehow environmental" (21) but he describes this wrap-around effect as being conducive to sharing the artist's space rather than as the means of creation of a new, third, space which is the space created by the painting and shared by all.

Whether or not Ewen's works create such a space, Campbell concludes his profound discussion of perception and wonder with: "There is no doubt whatsoever that Being-in-wonder is the true subject matter here" (56). Ewen creates wonder, and he does this not just in the painting but also in his viewer. However, I wish to suggest that it may be more productive to consider wonder as a by-product of an experience that his works create for the viewer. His works are not about wonder, they are about experience of which wonder is a part and they create a fragment of the whole experience, wonder and all, for the viewer.

### **Landscape Traditions and Implications**

In order to decipher the significance of the term "landscape" in the discussion of Ewen's work, it is necessary to briefly survey the circuitous path this genre has travelled from its beginnings as setting-provider for narrative paintings to its larger psychological and socio-political connotations in contemporary art. If we isolate the use of the term in

its contemporary context from its long, complex evolution, the extra freight “landscape” carries today may seem to align the term with the subject matter of Ewen’s work. In this thesis, I discuss the actual subject matter of Ewen’s work and argue that, in fact, the experiential content of his work places him outside the tradition of landscape and its implications.

To set the context for the current use of the term “landscape”, we may explore the evolution of the genre as laid out by Charles Harrison, W.J. Mitchell and other informed scholars in Landscape & Power. There Harrison sets out the range of implications of the landscape beyond Kenneth Clark’s discussions of landscape as nature in Landscape into Art. (1949) Harrison examines the ideological frame that is ever-present within the use of the landscape in art. In addition to Harrison’s observations about the idealizations of nature and the humanistic expressions those idealizations convey, John Barrell’s The Dark Side of the Landscape (1980) discusses the idealization of the poor, and the rural agricultural worker in English landscape painting of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century as a justification of capitalism and its consequences (85). All these idealizations, of the landscape and its inhabitants, have been polluted by the political agendas they have been conscripted to serve so well. The “sublime” landscape has become, ironically, a rather pedestrian form of propaganda for imperialism, capitalism and the class system. Its original mandate to uplift, inspire and celebrate nature, humanity and the landscape has been buried beneath an avalanche of accumulated cultural and critical debris. In the wake of this onslaught of socio-political intentions, modern art found it necessary to resort to its polar opposite, the near-eradication of the image entirely, in the movements of conceptualism and

minimalism that followed closely the heights of abstraction, as if imagery itself had become suspect through the abuse of the landscape.

Loaded with pernicious remnants of colonial empire (see Barrell, Harrison, Mitchell, and Scott Watson, among others), the idealization and symbolic underpinnings of landscape painting as it has developed in the last three hundred years, have a virtual stranglehold on the use of this type of imagery despite its earlier traditions of spiritual or mystical meaning. Both in eastern and western landscape painting in their early development, the conventions of the landscape genre grew first into a formal code of sky, land, sea with abbreviated details, often in stylized, simplified form to indicate rocks, trees, etc. in a reduced vocabulary of symbols. This early use of landscape, mostly as a setting for an outdoor genre of *mis-en-scene*, usually with figures, still had the humanity as its central subject. As the landscape grew in importance, parallel to the growth of its cultural significance, the landscape, or nature itself, became the central subject and the figures eventually disappeared altogether. The sublime, or the eternal, landscape was ideal, in part, because humans were absent, if not in actuality, at least from sight, and certainly from the painting.

If Ewen's departure from landscape traditions is to be understood, it may be useful to examine the tradition for its contributions to Ewen's works even if his artistic goals differ from those of romantic landscape painters. The physicality of his surface is perhaps a farthest, contemporary outcropping of Constable's "pleinairism" which "mimicked the idea of the transitory effect in the fleeting action of the paint, the ruggedly tactile surface which could detach itself from nature at the same time that it described it" (Novak 211). Ewen's desire to blur any distinction of image from execution through the



blatant display of his energetic process in the finished work may reflect a later evolution of Constable's and Turner's pioneering techniques. Constable's combination of scientism and painterliness along with his interest in natural phenomena (Novak 211) are interesting similarities with Ewen. Both artists are interested in the contents of the sky. Ewen's are clearly skies as imagined by humanity, while Constable and the many romantic painters that followed his path, are faithfully observing nature.

### **The Sublime Landscape**

Our sense of the sublime has shifted in the last three centuries. The belief in a divine presence, however invisible, that accompanied many a 17th century upward glance to a place called "heaven" may have been replaced by views of nature less accompanied by religious beliefs in the 18th century's days of discovery. Humanity's conquest of nature transformed us into gods of the earth and the focus turned from a spiritual place in the sky to the unknown territory awaiting our civilizing footsteps. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century science, nature became a laboratory for human experimentation, education, entertainment and exploitation. By then the grandeur and nobility of nature reflected pride of empire, a pride in humanity's ability to harness nature. Painting nature as vast and limitless only reinforced our sense of achievement in "taming" the wilds.

Today the Compact Oxford Canadian Dictionary defines the first use of the word sublime in the context of grand or noble and of "a high intellectual, moral or spiritual level, while a second use applies to nature or art; "producing an overwhelming sense of

awe, reverence, or high emotion, by reason of great beauty, vastness or grandeur” (1046). Here is evidence of the inherent dilemma in our concept of the sublime: is it nature or art that produces these responses, and that beauty or grandeur? If art produces this beauty, than is it the work of humanity? Conquering of nature as a work of art still smacks of conquest. We are organizing the nature depicted and the assumption is one of improvement (progress), if only in the picture. The concept of sublimity is an expression of humanity’s sense of our own power not nature’s, even if derives in part from our capacity for such “sublime” feelings. More likely still this definition reflects the implied belief that the sublime quality resides in our ability both to appreciate nature and make beauty in the form of art from those feelings.

By the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in western landscape painting, sublimity itself may have been tamed, if only in art. J. M. W. Turner, however, took paint and colour to new heights. His vibrant colour and abstract, expressive style turned the romantic, naturalistic light of Constable and Claude into paint (Novak 214). It was Turner who broke the ground that the French impressionists would later occupy. His creative exploitation of the material qualities of colour and paint (Novak 211) and his subsequent irreverence towards the illustrative aspects of historical painting were his great contribution to the western history of painting. A narrow interpretation of the far-reaching implications of Turner’s painterly style might limit the scope of his influence to landscape painting traditions simply because landscape was a principal subject at that time. Viewed in a larger context, by virtue of his revolutionary use of colour and paint he is really the English pioneer of modern western painting as a whole.

Turner was fascinated by the cataclysmic forces of nature just as Ewen was. He

took the sublime landscape and turned it into apocalyptic sublime in 1810 or 1811 in Snowstorm: Hannibal and His Army Crossing the Alps (Paley 108-9). Like Ewen who was deeply impressed by seeing a tornado and years later made a work from it (Campbell, 13), Turner's witnessing of a large thunderstorm in Yorkshire led him to this phantasmagorical tempest in the sky of his painting a few years later (Paley 108-9). In his later paintings like Shade and Darkness-the Evening of the Deluge (c. 1843), the sky almost fills the picture and is one large concentric mass of colour, light and movement. The dramatic effect dwarfs the small animals in the lower foreground. The events and figures are of no importance – the force of nature is all encompassing. As Paley point out, by this point in his career, Turner had abandoned the Burkean sublime (117) and his angel in The Angel standing in the Sun (c. 1846) is “icon-like in its disregard of illusory conventions” (117). Turner cleared a path for abstraction and expressionism that would follow him in the next century. Turner's painterly reformation of the northern romantic landscape into a vehicle for expression rather than a careful construction of historical painting or universal symbols, anticipates Les Automatistes and Abstract Expressionists who would directly influence Ewen a little more than a hundred years later.

The notion of the sublime landscape in Canadian landscape painting has been clearly identified with wilderness. While Europeans who painted sublime landscapes were careful to minimize the human presence; in the national traditions of white, English-speaking, Canadian artists (especially the Group of Seven) the figure's absence was, sadly, a prerequisite for sublimity even in the representation of landscapes where the stark solemnity of so-called wilderness was often a result of over-foresting. It was not because the wilderness was so harsh that those awe-inspiring pines stood alone but because people

who had little awe of them had taken many of their neighbour-trees to the mill.

Scott Watson assigns a racial implication to the whiteness of many of the Group's landscapes (277-8). The virginity of the Canadian wilderness ironically disguises both the eradication of the aboriginal inhabitants and the natural landscape that supported their conscientious, natural lifestyle. At the same time, the absence of any native presence is dramatic evidence of our reluctance to acknowledge their legitimate prior claim. Even Emily Carr's paintings of Indian sites usually featured the tree-like totem poles as the central subject rather than the people who made them.

Susan Glickman suggests in The Picturesque and the Sublime, our infatuation with nature and the wilds has been passed down through eighteenth century painting to literature, especially poetry. As Jacques Derrida extrapolates from Kant, the notion that beauty is definable through contour or form, and the sublime is indefinable, and therefore difficult to obtain in art while more readily found in nature (Glickman 11). If the interest in the beautiful, as in an ordered picture of nature representative of human ideals and ideas, is the underlying motive of most art considered to be part of romantic traditions, Wordsworth's pursuit of the sublime in nature was a search for experience, received through the sense and the mind of the sensitive viewer (Glickman 161-notes). He sought these experiences in wild landscapes and the anticipation of wilderness experience, unordered by the human hand, which would dominate our Canadian vision by the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and marks an earlier departure from the portrayal of the landscape for its symbolic meaning. In Wordsworth's view, if the sublime can be conveyed through art, the closer its representation comes to nature, the more likely it is to create a like experience in the viewer. This resemblance to nature need not be either idealistic or

realistic, but poetic or evocative, summoning sensations and thoughts that would occur in contemplation of the raw, natural counterpart.

### Changing Notions of the Landscape

Johanne Sloan writes: “the Smithson/Wieland/Snow generation of artists set out to explore both the natural world and the conceptual parameters of the landscape experience. This critical reflexivity does suggest a rupture with the modern and romantic schools of landscape art, including the Group of Seven” (74-5). If this conceptual awareness does represent a break with romantic traditions, it is useful to explore this awareness in Ewen’s work.

In Ewen’s paintings, the landscape breaks from romantic pictorial traditions in a different way. The details of nature dominate primarily through his rigorous physical execution, rather than through their representational forms. Whereas Snow and Wieland, for example, stretch our concept of the landscape by technologically creative means, through innovative uses of film and photography, Ewen expands the repertoire inherited from romanticism in a more direct, physical manner. Snow’s film La Région Centrale (1970) captured a large uninhabited panorama with a 360-degree rotation of his camera. Even though Snow was trying to take the narrative out of the picture as well as himself (Sloan, 81), the calculated arrangement of such an unusual shot draws our attention or awareness to the human creator of such a shot. However technologically generated, the fact of both the artist’s intervention and human purposes in employing technology,

supersede the impersonal process or its results. This view of nature is fundamentally unlike nature. It is not organic or random. No animal except a human being would ever see Snow's image of the landscape unless accidentally glimpsing the camera's viewer. This 360-degree view is only readily visible to a machine and to a human by way of humanity's creations: machines. Despite its artistic contribution, Snow's film underscores the superficiality of our creations in contrast to the infinite creation of the universe.

If Ewen also chooses to depict uninhabited views of nature, and favours the moon and sun for his subjects, it is in order to reveal the power of nature and not our brilliance in capturing images of it by whatever amazing technological means. Unlike Snow, he is not displaying, however indirectly, human achievement or his own clever artistic concept but rather his own vision of the beauty of nature. He is not documenting anything. He makes no attempt to hide the evidence of his own unusual perception. It is the very intense and personal involvement of the artist in the production of the colourful evidence of that perceptual transformation of the actual moon or sky that makes his experience available to be shared or re-experienced by the viewer. The works are documentary of Ewen's experience but not in the typical scientific or modern sense of documentary. They record a complex, subtle and yet wildly expressive interaction with one person's acute perceptions. Those perceptions have been re-manufactured as paint on plywood, and unashamedly by hand, if only assisted by a near-manual tool: the electric router. If Snow's machine-captured landscape was an attempt to remove the interpretation, or manipulation of form, so pervasive in modernist treatment of landscape imagery, the fact of the use of the film camera still remains obstinately present. The viewer cannot help but retain their awareness of the person who organized the camera's shot and who may still

be hidden nearby watching over their valuable equipment. Snow's wild landscape may be devoid of visible human figures but they are still there: the camera is evidence of their presence.

Another aspect of Ewen's works that sets him apart from the landscape traditions, although moonscape and landscape are his chosen subject imagery, is the use of the square format and central moon, earth, or sun. As will be discussed further in the last chapter, he employs the square format prevalent among his abstract colleagues, in one move liberating his moons from their visual connections to the earth's horizons and, simultaneously, his imagery from its subservience to the well-trodden paths of his landscape predecessors.

The moon as a portrait-like central image in a square, primarily flat shape floats free of the Smithson's "primacy of the rectangle" (qtd. in Sloan; 74) in easel painting and of the three dimensional or illusionistic space of the landscape genre. The elemental power of the moon's spherical beauty lies in its distance from humanity and earth's gravity, and in its great, invisible tidal pull: two substantial differences from the earthly landscape. The square format of many of Ewen's moonscapes accentuates the otherness rather than the similarity of our neighbour sphere.

Ewen's square moonscapes with central orbs separate themselves visually from the predominantly horizontal images of Canadian and European romantic landscape traditions. The subject of Ewen's works is not the landscape in our traditional view of earthly territory either wild or tamed, but rather raw "power, inevitability and wonder" (Teitelbaum 41). His moon is no longer a small dot suspended above a huge earth: it is not displayed in reference to the earth. Earth is not even in the picture. A massive moon

expands to nearly fill the entire, just-larger-than-life (eight foot high) plywood and hangs, suspended in infinite space, beyond any horizon. His centred, human-scale moon establishes the viewer's near-equal physical size beside the moon and places them conceptually within its different planetary atmosphere far from earth's gravity, rendering irrelevant comparisons to familiar earthly landscapes. His flat, simple square catapults our earthbound visual awareness into a new, deeper sensory space. This unrecognizable, non-traditional pictorial space launches our imaginations free of a habitual horizontal relationship to earth and space.

### **Beyond Landscape**

This revelation of nature is the impetus for Ewen's experiment. He is less faithful to style than to the experiential content he struggles to place before his audience. He advances his ambition to convey the unconveyable, to manufacture awe on a sheet of plywood. He accomplishes this with graphic references to earth, water, wind and sky as well as intensely expressive surfaces. The shapes and details are not so much representational but samples that trigger associated sensations in ways that actual landscapes trigger them. These sensations are assimilated by all the senses, and the mind, in the act of keen perception. Unlike his predecessors in the twentieth century, he freely employs a contemporary vocabulary of jaunty, even cartoon-like, shapes that are simpler than the carefully constructed, formally stylized landscapes of Harris, for example. Through these monumental, slightly graphic forms he achieves greater drama than the



brehtaking severity of the North so diligently engineered in the earlier Harris images. His success derives from the individuality of his original iconography that surprises us with its simplicity and does not idealize the landscape like the traditional forms of landscapes his predecessors', like Harris, used. In this regard, he has arisen, moon-like and distant, from the origins of twentieth century painting. However, he is not using his moon and landscape forms to mean things about civilization, but to convey the experience of wonder in the presence of nature, an experience from which so many of these formal landscape image icons were originally developed.

Ewen does not share his awe or his observations as a memory. He gives us the experience of nature. His paintings are not a record of an experience, but a fragment of experience itself. In an interview with Nick Johnson in 1975, Ewen accurately describes his rain-filled Coastline paintings: "They are more weather as such (45)". In an almost alchemic interaction with his materials, Ewen infuses his large plywood panels with intense, palpable atmosphere. Working rigorously, physically close to the surface, rather than the more typical distant, parallel stance of the painter, and working out from the centre of their surface, Ewen almost merges bodily with his paintings during the creative act. In Johnson's interview Ewen describes his process: "Kneeling in the middle of the painting with that gouging machine. It was like an exercise, a physical exercise in an almost oriental position. This being in the centre of the work instead of standing up opposite..." (45). Often working on hands and knees, the works he produces through such close interaction create an energetic visual space that surrounds the sensitive observer. Through his works, viewers are immersed in an actual experience rather than a picture that represents an experience.

## Chapter II

### Experiential Content: Capturing the Rain

#### Evolution in Beliefs about Experience

In the process of attributing the delivery of experience to Ewen's work, the first step is to elaborate on notions of experience. The complex evolution of ideas about experience is thoroughly analyzed in Martin Jay's Songs of Experience. In the introduction to his large, philosophical text, he alludes to the use of the word "experience" to represent "that which exceeds concepts and even language itself (5)." In the serious philosophical discussions of the term therein, the mere suggestion of something that exceeds language is often presented as an audacious and dubious proposition. Certainly, for many philosophers and historians, the majority of the authors Jay discusses, it was difficult to conceive of something of value that could exist beyond, or without, language. One memorable illustration of the philosophical tendency to treat language as supreme, is embedded in Jay's quote from Francis Bacon describing experience as a verifiable experiment, or what he termed "experiential literata-informed experiences that have been 'taught how to read and write'" (Jay 31). Just as the sign function of a work of art has, historically, often been considered subservient to its socio-political message, so does this earlier "scientific" understanding of experience, assume verifiable knowledge to be the significant function of that experience.

The assumption of the inherent objectivity of science that has dominated Western thought since the advent of Copernican astronomy (Jay 30), is later countered by John Locke's empiricism. In Locke's view, the evidence of the senses can still contribute to knowledge, and that knowledge need not be exclusively the product of scientific experiments (Jay 50). Locke saw perception as the basis for understanding, with judgement acting in the mind through its sifting of the residue of memory, as a catalyst to the receipt of perception through the senses (Jay 52). In adding imagination to the mix, Locke anticipated much future thought (Jay 63). In Jay's view it is Immanuel Kant, whose concept of the mind is as activity rather than a substance (Jay 69), who advanced a concept of knowledge as arising from experience, and of a unified mind shared by all humanity (Jay 73). Kant believed the self transcended the phenomenal world and resided in the realm of unknowable things (Jay 74). He combined the subjective, inner experience of the self with the sensational experience of external objects (Jay 74). The possibility of scientifically verifiable aspects of experience shared an uneasy co-existence with the impossibility of knowing the world in actuality, as *sic* {"things-in-themselves"} were fundamentally unknowable and beyond experience (Jay 75). As he further developed three streams of experience, he isolated the aesthetic experience from the less disinterested pleasures of the senses, bringing with it the equivalent of the assumed objectivity of science, in a similar distancing he believed to be inherent in the aesthetic experience. Part of this assumption of disinterestedness included the idea of universal or communal knowledge, a concept that oddly anticipates the dominance of socio-political interpretations in more recent art historical and historical thought and their preoccupation with globalization. This high regard for distancing, echoing the claim to

objectivity of scientific thought, contributes to a predominant scepticism about mystical or spiritual or experience throughout the Western thought of the last 300 years, especially in Europe.

Despite Kant's ideas about the aesthetic experience, his huge contribution to notions of perception is this idea of perception as an activity and the intermingling of self with the world of which human beings are a natural part. As I discuss later in this chapter, Ewen's acute perception and energetic movement while creating his works carry through to the viewer through movement. Merleau-Ponty's insightful thought about perception continues from Kant's activity to an all-pervasive sense of bodily movement as fundamental to perception.

### **Mystical/Spiritual Experience of Nature in Art: Historical Background to Ewen**

Visual artists have a long history of exploring notions of mysticism, spiritual and nature. In locating the discussion of mystical experience as an historical background to Ewen's works, I will outline Ann Davis's thoughts on mysticism in Canadian artists in The Logic of Ecstasy. Her notions of light, movement and space as central to her five subject artists are followed by a detailed comparison of Ewen and Rothko in these contexts. After connecting the immersion of the viewer in the two artists' works to their different uses of light, movement and space, I discuss briefly the power of images before returning to perception as movement in Maurice Merleau-Ponty's texts. The discussion of perception and the relation of memory to perception will be briefly explored. Ideas

about memory and perception provide a basis from which to elaborate on how movement assists the viewer to receive Ewen's experience through his works.

Ewen's fascination with natural phenomena reflects a longstanding interest in transcendental experience among many artists in North American art history. In the New World, the emphasis was on the individual vs. society, and a solitary quest for direct spiritual experience, often associated with wilderness, or less civilized landscapes. This quest had roots in European philosophical ideas of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century, in European romanticism and especially in Symbolism. As it developed here, American poets like Walt Whitman (1819-1892), followed by artists Arthur Dove, Marsden Hartley and Georgia O'Keefe, (Davis 5-6) as well as members of the Group of Seven, were keenly interested in this kind of experience. In her preface to The Logic of Ecstasy, Davis argues the importance of mysticism in understanding the work of Lawren Harris, Emily Carr, Fred Varley, Bertram Brookner and Jock Macdonald (x-xv). In summary, she writes of mysticism's effect on their ideas of movement, and concludes that "nature, space and movement...are the touchstones of the new Canadian mystical theory of art' (xvii).

Davis also comments on the Abstract Expressionists' desire to penetrate the world's mystery and cites Barnett Newman, Mark Rothko, Pollock and Adolph Gottlieb as examples (6). Quoting Pollock statement to Hans Hoffman: 'I am nature' (quoted from Jackson Pollock: Catalogue Raisonné; 26 in Davis; 6), Davis identifies Pollock as "a painter attempting to make his art mystical, a living, active union with the One" (6). Davis goes on to comment on the prevalent aesthetic and formalistic emphasis among twentieth-century art historians that chose not to explore the mystical or metaphysical aspects of art. She notes as exceptions: Sixten Ringborn on Kandinsky; Robert

Rosenblum and Roald Nasgaard on northern romanticism and mysticism respectively, and The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890-95 (c.1986) (7).

The strong following of transcendentalism, based heavily on nature, has been more passionately expressed by artists who enjoy the relatively untamed environment on this side of the Atlantic. As well as our spectacular landscape, the pioneer spirit and desire for exploration are characteristic of modern western North American artists who strove to create something new and different from their European predecessors. Like the artists Davis names, Ewen was less interested in a realistic depiction than in capturing some elemental aspects of nature. Evident in Ewen's words in many articles and catalogues is his inspiration through nature's great mysteries revealed by outer space, night skies and weather in all their phenomenal variations (see Campbell, Johnson, Teitelbaum).

Davis defines mysticism, in accordance with her source, Evelyn Underhill, as a practice of communing with the "real" by an active assimilation aimed at a union with life. Davis chose Underhill's Practical Mysticism (1943) as her principal reference because it was written in the period Davis writes about<sup>iii</sup> and Underhill's book focuses on artists as mystics (3). She alludes to Underhill's belief that artists are more directly in contact with essential or real things through their heightened intuition (4-5), noting the commonality of the artist's search for mystical union with reality in both literature and visual art over the last century (5). In terms of her subject Canadian artists she alludes to the influence of theosophy and transcendentalism which stress the interconnection of all things, an interest exemplified by Madame Blavatsky's Theosophical Society in New York created in 1875 (xvi). Davis traces the roots of the mysticism of her chosen five Canadian artists

to nineteenth-century transcendentalism, and especially Whitman's beliefs. She ascribes this strong Whitman influence to three authors who were prominent in the artistic circles around these Canadian artists, here in Canada<sup>iv</sup>.

Davis connects Emily Carr's mysticism to her religious and spiritual beliefs as revealed in her diaries, and to the influences of Lawren Harris and Fred Housser (14). Davis attributes Harris's thinking partially to Kandinsky's ideas about artists' affinity to nature through their work, which employs laws common to nature and art (119). In his brilliant 1912 document, Concerning the Spiritual in Art, Wassily Kandinsky elaborates on the spiritual content of art. He writes of the artist whose "work will give to those observers capable of feeling them emotions subtle beyond words (24)." Kandinsky expressed his theosophical ideas in abstract forms that revealed underlying connections between nature and art. He intuitively discovered relationships of form and pattern that were common to both (Davis 119). Davis links Harris's ideas to Kandinsky's and then traces Harris's search for theoretical frameworks for abstraction that led him eventually to spatial ideas of Dynamic Symmetry through painter Emil Bistram (122) in Taos, New Mexico.

### **Movement and Space Reveal Mysticism in Carr's Later Works**

In Davis' descriptions of Carr's mysticism, she cites Carr's diaries from the 1930's in which the influences of a Christian mystic's writings seem to have added a pantheistic aspect to Carr's already strong religious beliefs (16). She quotes Carr's own definition of significance in a painting as: "the hole you put the thing into, the space that wraps it

round, and the God in the thing that counts above everything' (18; quoted from "Talk on Art" by M. Emily Carr, University of British Columbia Library, Special Collections Division, Cheney Papers, 6). Carr's later works' sense of space that opens outward and upward seems to include the viewer. This deep space distinguishes her work from that of Lawren Harris and commercially trained Group painters who used a stylized flat design to emphasize graphic form more than movement or space. Carr's mystical beliefs are powerfully expressed in her later works through dramatic spatial composition and movement. In both of these aspects, the spatiality and movement unusual in Canadian art at that time, Carr anticipates Ewen's revelations of the experiential content of natural phenomena. Davis's descriptions of Carr's later works underline the transcendentalism and the role of movement: "she has transcended the distinction between the self and non-self to pull the viewer directly into the pathos of nature... The whole forest sings and sways. The logic of the movement of life is evident and palpable, for we participate in it" (18).

Davis's emphasis on the movement in Carr's work reflects the aspect of Carr's forests and landscapes that conveys the essence of life as movement. Movement is fundamental to our perception, which is experienced through all our senses, not only through sight, and most often experienced as we move through the world. The connections of nature to movement, and movement to perception will be further explored later in this chapter.



## Physical Intimacy in Ewen and Rothko

Although Rothko is almost universally regarded as an abstract artist, there is more about natural light in his abstraction than most of his New York School contemporaries. His frustration with labels like “abstract” that grouped him with his more hard-edged or non-objective colleagues seems justified. The “veils” of colour or paint that he delicately built up to achieve his largely tonal effects, regardless of their sometime brilliant colour, are more aligned with Rembrandt or Goya than they were with the likes of Barnett Newman. Both in the naturalistic use of dark and light, and in his humanistic intentions, Rothko’s vocabulary of painting owes a great deal to romanticism and earlier religious painting traditions. This is one link between him and Ewen. The two painters share romantic roots but Ewen is less concerned with departing from the symbolic imagery and is keen on leaving his gestural activity on display, like many abstract-expressionists.

Although Rothko sought a subtle, quietly energetic field, Chave does point out the presence of Rothko’s gestural fields beneath the dominant soft rectangles or rectangular veils (77) that distinguish his use of architectural or geometric forms from that of his purist abstract predecessors, like Malevich or Mondrian. The subtle vibration of his coloured veils and the modulation of overlapping soft rectangles convey light and movement more than shape. This movement carries the sense of breath or life. It is their use of light and movement that convey experience in both Ewen and Rothko’s work even if their use of these elements differs dramatically.

The other fundamental commonality of the two artists is their reference to landscape. Rothko was adamant that his content was human tragedy (see Ashton,

Chave). If he does convey this tragedy, he does so with the atmosphere, light and shadow most of us experience in the landscape. Even if the predominance of vertical rectangles in Rothko's compositions is reminiscent of figures or portraits (Chave 129-30), Rothko's murky veils with their glimmering under lighting are readily associated with the vapours of the elements and earth. Chave cites Robert Rosenblum's inscription of Rothko in the romantic traditions of northern western painting<sup>v</sup> where nature represents transcendental or spiritual experience and conjures the sublime (129). The atmospheric painting effects are Rosenblum's ammunition in linking Rothko to his landscape predecessors, especially J.M.W. Turner, but it is also the sense of "sublimity...associated with vastness or magnitude, boundlessness and formlessness" which Rosenblum attributes to Rothko's emptiness (129).

Another interesting observation Chave makes is of Rothko's mysterious rectangles as being the remains of traditional landscapes with figures, now with their figures removed (130-131). She suggests that Rothko adopted the abstract rectangular shape once occupied by the figure, and filled it with the empty landscape that usually set off that figure, thereby conveying an absence, a void, and, simultaneously, a presence through the implication of a figure where now only an atmospheric rectangle floats, containing its own horizon and infinite depth. Emptied of figures, the semblance of movement suggested by shimmering landscape light and a living void or absence reminiscent of human presence create "extraordinary poignancy" through this use of "the most basic and familiar sign for absence—the visual code for landscape or open, vacant space... insinuated into a sign for presence or positive form" which Chave reads as a presence conveyed through an absence, thereby intimating mortality (132).

Chave goes on to discuss the relationship of human beings with our environment, and the subject with the object, in order to establish Rothko's achievement of unity in his works as a reflection of this marriage of often-separated elements. She places this discussion in the historical context of philosophies that have frequently been implicated in theological thought. She cites Pythagoras's idea of humans as little worlds because they contained the universe within them and Plato's idea that the gods gave the human figure a rounded form, especially in the head, to replicate the rounded sphere of earth (134). The unity of humanity and the world, which Chave traces from Jung back to "primitive" world views, is perhaps demonstrated not only by the spectral absence-presence of figures in Rothko's painted voids but also by the enveloping, all-encompassing experience of Rothko's paintings, especially the in-the-round group and chapel installations. The viewer is immersed in the works through depth of field and their arrangement in space - an arrangement that resembles a human in the landscape more than it does a viewer before a window-like easel picture in a traditional gallery setting. Similarly, the implied viewer in Ewen's spectacular landscapes and moonscapes creates a sense of enfolding, a round world as unlikely to emerge from the flat plywood as it is from the vague rectangles of Rothko's re-configured universe.

Just as Carr describes (see above; 23) the imaginal space that an artist places their painting in, the sensory experience created by Ewen and Rothko's works harnesses the viewers' perception. These artists engage their viewers by creating a sense of three-dimensional space through their perception of mainly two-dimensional surfaces. Ewen's surface movement creates an energetic field and Rothko's light creates a sense of

movement while his spatial arrangements create the viewer's sense of being in the paintings.

In The Rothko Book, Bonnie Clearwater discusses Rothko's 1949 statement about the painter's task of elimination of obstacles. Rothko wished to eliminate the obstacles between the painter and his idea as well as the obstacles between the idea and the observer (Clearwater 105). The aim of experiential immediacy is one he shares with Ewen. Through different technical means of execution both artists seek to immerse the viewer, quite physically, in the experience of the canvas, or in Ewen's case, the plywood.

Both artists tried to eliminate the interruption created by the edge of the support. They offer a picture plane that appears to extend off all sides, into the physical space shared by the picture and the viewer. Both have abandoned perspective but still seek to create a different kind of spatial depth, through sensory immersion rather than strictly by its analogous relationship to any real perspective or real objects. Their images could be described as icons of the real, inviting the viewer into an experience that evokes being through the reminder of their own embodiment. If the viewing body is the moving body, then immersion in a Rothko colour field or in Ewen's deep textures creates the experience of being in space. A Ewen moon or a Rothko rectangle is not a symbol or a sign referent to a thing-in-the-world, but rather an experience that mirrors and enhances being-in-the-world through the memory of movement.

Merleau-Ponty writes: "Since things and my body are made of the same stuff, vision must somehow take place in them; their manifest visibility must be repeated in the body by a secret visibility. 'Nature is on the inside', says Cezanne. Quality, light, colour, depth, which are there before us, are there only because they awaken an echo in our body

and because the body welcomes them" ("Eye and Mind" 164). The inscription of experience on the human being takes place in our bodies. Merleau-Ponty captures this sense of resonance between the human being and the world within the body: "It makes no difference if [the painter] does not paint 'from nature'; he paints, in any case, because he has seen, because the world has at least once emblazoned in him the ciphers of the visible" (166).

Rothko sought to express more of what one thought rather than what one felt (Clearwater 103). Ewen was also attempting to communicate a vision of nature as received in the mind, but through more physical or sensual, less purely cerebral, means. Regardless of their different intentions, the Rothko works are experienced through an imaginative/sensory combination that is quite the same viewing process that serves the Ewen works so well. Both emphasize the importance of a sensory transference of experience to the viewer over any literal or symbolic content. Roughly and energetically gouging the plywood, Ewen creates a remnant of the earth itself in each of his unabashedly symbolic images. Imagery is secondary to his expressive surfaces and their sensual effects, but Ewen keeps nature visible as an image because he wants the viewer to know where all this magical experience is coming from. Rothko is interested in nature's mystery, but his is the mystery of the human soul or psyche and its endless implications.

Ewen receives his sensory experience and although it ruminates in his imagination and memory, he tries very hard to put significant remnants of what he felt or saw back in a less carefully filtered form. Rothko makes no bones about creating the experience he is presenting. He manipulates the formal aspects and the paint in extremely subtle and profound ways. Even if the subject matter of his works is spiritual or mysterious, his

deliberate formal means for creating these effects are anything but. Unlike Ewen, or possibly Pollock, Rothko is not passing on anything unconscious through obvious energetic movement or action. His works are consciously distilled and their spectral qualities are achieved through very deliberate orchestration. Anna Chave acknowledges the influence of automatism on Rothko but writes that it was never a technical device, just a method of realization by probing the unconscious in search of universal myths (77). Unlike the expressionistic gestures of Ewen's ritualistic gouging or Pollock's wild paint throwing, Rothko is an accomplished illusionistic painter even if his illusions are not intended to represent recognizable objects.

### **Experience and Process Become Imagery**

Unlike many international and Canadian colleagues, Ewen's unique contribution is not as much his use of either landscape imagery or abstraction, but rests in his highly personal physical interaction with his materials. In his unusual physical process, he invests his works with the residue of actual experience, not mere symbolic representation in images. He can employ the obvious imagery with ease, without fear of its cliché connotations, because the experiential power of his works so obviously surpasses this imagery or its symbolic function. Teitelbaum writes of this content in Ewen's works: "a subject to represent experience through a method and material practice" (41). Both Teitelbaum and Philip Monk attribute the effects of Ewen's phenomenascapes on the viewer to his materials, process and scale. Teitelbaum describes their peculiar effect: "they

seem very much alive, radiating a virtual force-field of energy that spills into each viewer's space, unconfined by the finite edge of the support. They are, in a very real sense, monumental, and in their sustained power, they extend the experience and traditions of landscape painting in Canada" (41). In examining the historical traditions of both abstract and landscape art, I construct the theoretical framework for the presentation of Ewen's work in a much more specific context: that of a highly individual record of human experience not readily attributed to either abstraction or landscape but more likely to a type of aesthetic collision between the romantic sensibilities of landscape and the expressionistic methodologies of abstraction.

### **Mystery, Perception and Wonder in Ewen's Works**

The obvious evidence of acute perception or observation of nature in Ewen's work prepare the viewer for an enhanced experience much like what may occasionally occur when one is open to the magnificence of nature in its raw form. Teitelbaum speaks of this when he writes: "we are invited to engage with something outside of ordinary experience...The unknowable is made real (79)". James D. Campbell's Startled Wonder: the Phenomenascapes of Paterson Ewen takes its title from Ewen's personal account of his reaction to seeing a tornado (13). Campbell devotes much of his sensitive text to Ewen's creation of wonder in the viewer. He attributes Ewen's heightened perception through touch to untreated severe myopia in childhood and the startling effect of acute vision many years later after new eyeglasses (19). Campbell suggests that myopic young

Ewen learned to see shapes through touch before getting glasses. This may have given the artist his pronounced tactility in both process and works. This artist uses most of his body and his touch to execute his works. Ewen allows the materiality of the plywood to be a strong presence in the work through the gouging and the resulting reveal of the wood grain. Tactile qualities conspire to the greater physicality of his works and a heightened sense of objecthood, so helpful in distinguishing his paintings from the illusionistic, easel-based framing devices of landscape painting traditions.

The prominence of tactile qualities in Ewen's works would seem to invite comparisons with craft, printmaking or sculpture. Ewen's physical process shares elements with all three artistic practices. His gouging could be viewed as a variation on wood-carving. The strong connection to materials and process is a recognized aspect of craft. The use of the router and wood could superficially link his art with either sculpture or printmaking. Even if there is abundant tactility, Ewen is exploiting this to extend the expressive qualities of his objects, distinguishing his works from the majority of contemporary paintings. In his originality he has invented a practice that doesn't neatly fit even within the realm of painting. Perhaps aspects of that invention are readily compared with craft or sculpture. Yet unlike sculpture, and much craft that is made in wood, his primarily two dimensional work, although it evokes an imaginal three dimensional space, is still mainly flat and painted despite its highly developed textures.

This discussion about the generic divisions of art-making leaves aside the long evolution of his imagery. Ewen's plywood paintings are still paintings if only because the imagery he uses is readily found in the history of painting more easily than it is in the corresponding history of craft. Yet it is interesting to consider the intersection of craft



and painting generally in period of Ewen's major shift: the late 1960's and 1970's. During the same period that he developed out of the legacy of Les Automatistes into a contemporary London artist using metal and plywood in painted constructions, craft was undergoing a parallel transformation.

In Crafting Identity Sandra Alföldy writes of the exchange between art and craft that inspired the liberation of ceramics from pottery traditions (133). Like Ewen chose his Moon images in distant space in part to escape the traditional landscape context, ceramists like Peter Voulkos and Jack Sures adopted a scale and expressiveness like that of abstract expressionism in a similar rejection of their ceramic traditions (133). The 1960's and 1970's generated a revolutionary imperative throughout North American art, and this gradually spread through art and craft alike.

In considering Ewen's surface "carving" as sculptural, it can only be compared to bas-relief at best; a form of sculpture not commonly in use among contemporary or modern sculptors at least not as it has traditionally been understood. Modernist sculpture is generally more about shape than imagery or texture, especially in its volumetric occupation of space. If anything, Ewen's use of plywood (and other industrial materials) owes its origins not to modern sculpture but to the conceptual artists he met in London, Ontario<sup>vi</sup>.

Ironically, Canada may have lost a great contemporary printmaker when Ewen decided to paint instead of printing his first oversize woodcut. Since he was not a printmaker himself, it is unlikely that the drawing he made by gouging the plywood could have printed an image as aesthetically pleasing as the hand-made, hand painted wooden object he decided not to print<sup>vii</sup>.

Yet his plywood moons do not “fit the mould” of any of these disciplines: at least they do not fit there any more easily than they fit within the landscape painting tradition. Ewen allows the materiality of the plywood to be a strong presence in the work through the gouging and the resulting reveal of the wood grain. Tactile qualities conspire to the greater physicality of his works and a heightened sense of objecthood, so helpful in distinguishing his paintings from the illusionistic, easel-based framing devices of landscape painting traditions.

Simon Schama’s penetrating exploration of human wonder in Landscape and Memory has deepened our understanding of the role of the landscape in our cultural history. He writes: “Before it can ever be a repose for the senses, landscape is the work of the mind. Its scenery is built up as much from strata of memory as from layers of rock” (6-7). In light of recent medical discoveries, Schama’s notions of the memory’s contribution to perception are extraordinarily profound. This great contribution of memory is vital to understanding how Ewen’s works affect the viewer and create experience.

In The New Yorker, surgeon and medical science author Atul Gawande writes of recent scientific ideas of perception that have changed beliefs about the brain’s functions (58-65). The author argues that the old notion of perception is what most people believe: that nerves receive sensations like coldness or hardness and pass these sensations along as messages through our spine, as if through an electrical wire to be decoded in the brain. This mechanistic model of perception assumes that the sensory data from our eyes, ears, nose, etc. is all we need and perception functions like a radio. He reports that the scientists who have analyzed the sensory signals found them to be surprisingly

impoverished: the optic nerve's transmissions of light entering the eye were insufficient to "reconstruct the three-dimensionality, or the distance, or the detail" (62).

Gawande writes of "extraordinary rich" images in the mind and how we can distinguish heavy from light, dead from alive, yet the data we build from is very poor. He observes that we assume most of the fibres to the brain's visual cortex come from the retina. Scientists have discovered that a mere twenty percent come from vision. The remaining eight percent come from parts of the brain that govern functions like memory. He cites Richard Gregory, a neurophysiologist who estimated that visual perception is greater than ninety per cent from memory and under ten per cent in sensory nerve signals (63). He goes on to write of the mind's capacity to integrate scattered, poor signals with information from earlier experiences, and combining these with hard-wired processes to produce a rich sensory experience made with brain-generated colour, texture, shape, sound and meaning (63).

The memory's capacity to create images is the experience that Ewen is offering his viewers. Ewen's acute perception (see Campbell) is followed by resonance within his imaginal practice, Japanese-inspired, of absorbing a physical experience through observation and then, after a period of rumination within memory issuing the image in a rigorous attack on a sheet of plywood<sup>viii</sup> – a ritual artistic practice that reinforces the sensual and tactile aspects of the original sensations that informed the artist's memory. The visual excitement of his extraordinary art-making practice echoes in the perception and memory processes of his viewers, creating for the viewer an amazingly similar experience.

If memory is the greatest contributor to images in the mind, how much more powerful must be the memory of an artist like Ewen, who has honed his famously acute perception (see Campbell) to tune in to his extraordinary sensory memories while delivering through his body, the tactile, living, dimensional images that he feels in his mind's eye? Like any human practice, memory can be heightened through use, and Ewen has exercised his memory vigorously and intensely over many years in repeated creative acts.

This very essential experience of the physical universe is one that artists have often been open to receive through practising acute vision, redelivering it to the rest of the human race by creating images that convey the visual power of their experience. This power is a mystical power, one that reveals things in their being rather than replicates them in their design. Their acts of seeing are ways of being. Visual experience in this case is a door to mystical experience, to reflection on the being-in-things. Rather than still replicas, they ask our moving, seeing memories to recall the animation or the breath of life that we experience in common with the being of things.

### **The Response to Visual Images**

Visual images have been vehicles for spiritual experience in every civilization. We observe their power still in many objects through which we trace the cultures of the past. Images are specifically functioning in that way in Ewen's work with great success, as I argue through careful examination of specific works. In *The Power of Images* David

Freedberg writes “from the beginnings of recorded history, people have invested material objects with the divine, as if that were the only way to grasp it. It is this fact—cognitive as well as historical—against which the philosophers have railed” (65). His introduction opens with a strong statement that he is not writing about the history of art but about the “relations between images and people in history” (1).

His discussion of images may be inspired by religious images but it applies equally to all visual art. He discusses the perceived gulf between learned and “popular” responses to works of art which Freedberg claims have been largely overlooked by Western art historians who have been preoccupied by their critical self-consciousness and development of critical thought (xxi). He acknowledges a more comfortable blend of the “popular” with the “cultivated” in older, non-Western societies (xxi) and admits that much of his book addresses viewers’ responses that rational positivist Westerners regard as “irrational, superstitious, or primitive, only explicable in terms of ‘magic’ “(xxi).

How do we actually see images? As Gawande reveals, the images in our brains are mostly memory. The power of a visual image to trigger this memory reprocessing is akin in function to the parallel process of conscious, concentrated visualization that an artist practices in the “mind’s eye” in preparation for creating an image in a work of art. Both are visualizations prompted by images. One set of images is in the work; another set is in the memories of creator and viewer. If the artist chose an image to convey his or her experience, the artist’s associated memories may trigger similar associations in the viewer’s memory. Even if the viewer’s associations are not identical, the many commonalities in human experience are frequently sufficient to blur any discordant differences. If the viewer makes a choice to look a little longer or respond to a given work,

this may demonstrate the common experience or memory that inspires a viewer to open his or herself to a work.

These energetic memory or perceptual exchanges are exactly different enough from our rather materialistic, technological ideas about how things work to bring into question any scientific or pseudo-scientific analysis of such ephemeral, subtle processes. “How things work” is an everyday idiom of our western English spoken language. This idiom is dramatic evidence of a mechanistic or machine-oriented view of the mysteries of creation, and of that most fascinating, to us, of earthly non-things: the human being. In our western culture, all too often the attempt to understand things precludes seeing or experiencing them. Scientific thinking dominates our understanding: we look at things in the world in terms of how they work, like machines, not how they are. In many ways we look at our own bodies as machines and in doing so we miss many of the most interesting functions. Capitalism and science, or more specifically, the assembly-line manufacture of goods and machines that serve capitalism, may have been the original source of this way of thinking. However, critically educated contemporary art historians can have no such excuse. Their theories have condemned capitalist and colonialist ideological uses of art and they must subject their own critical approaches to aesthetics to equally rigorous scrutiny.

## Merleau-Ponty and Contemporary Thought on Perception

For Merleau-Ponty, visual perception is not about obtaining the idea of an object through stimulation of the retina, the simple delivery of a message to the brain. Rather, the experience of vision is inextricably linked to living in a moving body. Without eye movement to direct the eye, vision would be a different process entirely. Vision occurs in a body, in reference to the surrounding space as related to the body, and it bears the inscription of the memory of movement. The viewer and his world, moreover, share a bodily being, and vision-movement is the reminder and the channel by which we experience this link.

“The visible world and the world of my motor projects are each total parts of the same Being... Immersed in the visible by his body, itself visible, the see-er does not appropriate what he sees; he merely approaches it by looking, he opens himself to the world” (“Eye and Mind” 162). Perception is a point of unveiling where the world and the human body are revealed as of the same fabric. “There is a human body when, between the seeing and the seen, between touching and the touched, between the eye and the other, between hand and hand, a blending of some sort takes place—when the spark is lit between sensing and sensible” (163).

The viewing person is inscribed by the world he moves in, inhabited by the world he inhabits. A painter generates a moment of communion by externalizing his or her inner inscription of the visible world. Vision is not just spatial memory, but recognition-recognition of things not as other but as having their own being, of the animateness of life.

The body is not merely a thing or an object, but the space inhabited by my being; likewise, the things in my field of vision are things I can experience as part of the same fabric of being, not merely as objects. The painter has the capacity to usher a viewing subject into a reflection on being, especially through the use of image as icon. An icon is an effective image that provides an opportunity to reflect on the being of things. It is not merely a replica or a simulacrum, it is not a sign with one stable referent—it is a marker which effects and indicates movement and relationship.

Ewen, as an extraordinary viewer, creates experiences in which the viewer can be inscribed by the world with which he was inscribed, in the way he was innerly carved into by his vision, in the way he in turn carved images into the plywood. He offers the experience of vision as one of lasting physical effect mirroring the experience of embodied seeing that Merleau-Ponty describes. These experiences are not experiences for the mind or the intellect alone, nor are they especially aimed at the critical viewer: they are intended for human beings who live in their bodies. Human beings perceive the world through vision and movement that are inextricably linked, yet we are easily distracted by intellectual ideas and need visionary artists to remind us that we experience everything in our bodies, that body and being blend into each other.

Ewen's words in the 1975 interview with Nick Johnson reveal his visionary process of capturing the essence of rain:

“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 on all levels of his being, then he would go back and do it” (Ewen quoted in Johnson, 45).



## Chapter III

### On the Moon

If we compare the famous Apollo photographs of the moon (fig. 15-19) with Ewen's hand-made moonscapes, the personalized, expression-charged quality of his images contrasts dramatically with the technologically collected photographs. In the presence of Ewen's plywood, we do in fact experience the Moon, or at least Ewen's Moon. More importantly, we experience this Moon in an intimate physical proximity that is, in reality, impossible. The view of the Moon from Apollo is a view from a vast distance, at once remote, literally, and indirectly seen only by means of technology. Ewen's moons are physically present in the room with us, and can be seen and experienced on our human level and scale. This detailed analysis of Ewen's Moon series from 1980 to 1991 uses the following works as principal subjects: Gibbous Moon (1980), Full Moon (1984), Half Moon (1987), Eclipse of the Moon (1990), Full Moon (1990) and Satan's Pit, (1991). A few earlier works situate the Moon images in relation to their immediate precursors: they are moons in landscapes except Cloud over Water (1979) (fig. 1) and Halley's Comet as Seen by Giotto (1979) (fig. 2).

From 1973 Ewen treated the subject of galaxies. The comets and galaxies in his 1970's works are sometimes central in a night sky but never as dominant as the 1980-1991 solo moons. Teitelbaum notes: "by 1974, with few exceptions, Ewen began to create images with a radiant centre—moon, sun, single tree—whose energy flies unconstrained beyond the plywood edge. Here the force of nature is seen and felt as a part of the viewer's space" (79).

## Touching the Moon: Historical Context

In the late 1960's, Ewen's growing conceptual awareness was fertilized by his association with his peers in the rich, cultural milieu of London, Ontario (Teitelbaum, 58-62). Before the more elaborately gouged plywood paintings of the late 1970's and the 1980's, his experimental works of the early 1970's are minimal, linear in imagery, reflecting a more abstract sign or symbol for the experience conveyed. They are more constructions than paintings. Their playful, inventive use of materials reveal his strong interest in the physical execution and sensual surface of the work, even while displaying the evident influence of his London compatriots Murray Favro, Ron Benner, Dave Gordon and the Rabinowitch brothers (Teitelbaum 60-1).

The popular fascination with space piqued by the early astronauts reached a climax with the 1968 release of Stanley Kubrick's 2001: A Space Odyssey, one of the most influential films of the decade. Although we can only view it second hand through satellites and machines, the larger "landscape" has become a part of our everyday reality as well as our active visual memory. Through our imagination, we have visually experienced the view of our own planet from above as well as the surface of the moon and other planets. From the London years onwards, Ewen has made this large, extra-terrestrial landscape as immediate and knowable as his revered Constable and Turner<sup>ix</sup> once made the stormy skies over London, England.

Fiction anticipated fact as with so many other events in the McLuhanesque world of the late 1960s'. Kubrick's 2001 was soon followed by its real-world counterpart.

Television was the medium through which the world watched the first current event of history to be witnessed simultaneously by millions of people: the Apollo lunar landing.

July 20, 1969 was, arguably, the climax of the American dream. The first Life magazine cover<sup>x</sup> photo (fig. 14) of the incipient journey anticipates the direction the magazine's reportage would take. Neil Armstrong's portrait, centre-page, eclipses the dark mystery of the distant moon lurking in the background. The images that proliferate in Life's articles documenting the momentous events foreground the men whose lunar footprints may ironically outlast our planet Earth.

Another dominant image in the early Life coverage is the American flag. The celebration of humanity's achievement only slightly surpasses pride in the militaristic victory of the United States in being the first to stick their flagpole in the mysterious lunar dust. In light of the politics of the cold war, the moon may have been the 1969 finish line of a technological arms race. In a post-colonial universe, these images – of flags and footprints – appear outrageously barbaric and inappropriate. The sharp metal flagpole impales the lovely emptiness of the moon in an image of violation that rivals the famous rape paintings of the baroque tradition. The brash, loud colours and graphic shapes of the American flag visually jar with the mid-toned softness of the grey moonscape. The bold symbol of nationalistic claims and once-proud icon of liberty now looms impotent and incongruous in this virginal, timeless moonscape.

Earth, prior to Apollo's takeoff and during the moon landing, is perhaps equally significant as a setting in which these astronomical events also took place. On television, itself only a slightly earlier modern marvel, over 500 million viewers watched these American human-gods step down on the lunar surface. Endless streams of cars and

trucks photographed approaching the Cape Canaveral launch site resemble refugee migrations in wartime<sup>xi</sup>. Here spectators watch the sky in eager anticipation of explosions of a different kind. The sense of spectacle is palpable and intense: as bright as the gleam of Florida sunshine in the myriad sunglasses that fill the pages of Life.<sup>xii</sup>

The sense of spectacle and of scale predominates throughout Life's coverage of the launch and the moon landing. Aside from the inconceivable distance humans travelled to reach the Moon, the realization of an earth-like place of the Moon's scale completely uninhabited seemed incomprehensible to most of the audience watching television in 1969. The great majority of that audience lived in populated areas and was unlikely to have spent much time in remote places, let alone places utterly untouched by humans. Even Canada has very few places as devoid of signs of human occupation as the Moon. The last great wilderness, truly untamed, had at once an undeniable purity that appealed to contemporary humanity while retaining the fearful prospect of its vast inhospitality to human life. In countries like the U.S. and Canada, where pioneers were a recent memory if not one's own grandparents, viewers were particularly fascinated with this latest frontier.

As much as the images captured from the lunar landing altered our views of the Moon, they altered our awareness of outer space itself. The figure of a person walking about performing highly scientific tasks in a spacesuit that looked like a high-tech child's snowsuit nonetheless resembled many things we do on earth. If only through the familiarity of the human figures and the actions they performed, the Moon was effectively reduced to another version of earth. The visual information delivered to so many people via televised satellite feeds transformed forever the heretofore incomparable

and mysterious landscape of the Moon, rendering it not only comparable to ours but also near commonplace in a variety of ways.

Ordinary people, not just astronomers and scientists looking through powerful telescopes, could now see the moon close-up in just the way they look at most of the earth-on television, and with the human figure establishing scale as it does in most landscapes. In short, anyone with access to a television could now see the Moon in the most banal of contexts-that of the daily televised news. By means of the medium by which so many saw the Moon during these dramatic events, the beauty of the lunar landscape itself became secondary to the fact of its human exploration. At the same time, the similarity of the moon to the earth was augmented by the customary earthly insertion of the human figure at once establishing scale and the fact of the Moon's colonization.

More significant than establishing a sense of scale, the unimaginable sight of moving human figures enabled viewers to see the Moon in ways they may never had before by virtue, not only of a human presence, but by means of the tasks the astronauts were performing. Why were those tasks significant? We didn't necessarily know or need to know specifically what those men were doing in their snowsuit-like outfits more reminiscent of science fiction than any real scientists' garb we had viewed on earth. The fact of their movement convinced most viewers that they were real men and that they were really there. Their movement was the most dramatic visual proof of human life on the Moon, even if that life came from somewhere else. Outer space became real in the moment we saw men moving through it for the first time. As with Ewen's moonscapes, it was the movement in the televised picture that created the experience.

Ewen's images of the Moon are significant for their primordial force and their imaginative presence in a time when even the mysterious moon is in danger of becoming a new fourth-world country or colony waiting in the wings. We have lived with the everyday reality of those televised images of the Apollo mission for almost forty years. Like other life-altering events of our time (WWII, for example), the impossible did happen and has been largely forgotten already.

### **Extra-Terrestrial Awareness**

Besides the influences of the 1960's and 1970's with the large landscape-based installation works of artists like Smithson and Christo, etc., contemporary awareness of the landscape has been greatly expanded by our technological explorations of space. Incorporating that extraterrestrial awareness, Ewen's rectangles and squares no longer limit themselves to replication of either a window-like view or that of a human eye in the landscape. Just as in Mark Rothko's paintings, the picture plane extends beyond the edge of the plywood. In Ewen's work, especially the later single sphere works discussed here, the picture plane is no longer contiguous to earth's space. Ewen's works open a picture plane from a new opening somewhere in space.

Greater popular familiarity with satellite photography and the close-up details they provide of space objects once known, except via telescope, only as tiny distant dots, has expanded our mental and visual view of the universe to include equally the microscopic with the far distant views of both of our earth and its inhabitants. We have a

sense of what humanity once thought only God could see. We have taken God's place. In the wake of both technological and artistic advances, our contemporary visual and spatial awareness frees Ewen to collect his details of the real earth, moon or sun from a variety of scales of information and he liberally uses them all.

Ewen's moons and suns are truly uninhabited and their intimately detailed surfaces are rich and visually exciting by virtue of what he makes of them, not their potential to become settings for human life or activity. His moons and suns are full of energy and life. They do not require a human presence to complete the picture, even in the sense that a Lawren Harris rocky island speaks of its beauty in terms of human absence or non-presence. Ewen reveals the moon's natural beauty as that of the moon: ours to experience not to possess.

This fundamental difference sets Ewen's works apart from the Romantic landscape traditions that they nonetheless arise from. His purpose in offering his vision of nature differs from that, however unconscious, of his traditional landscape predecessors. Like Cezanne, Ewen is interested in reducing the symbolic functions of the image in order to convey its essence while also observing actual after-effects of light as in Bonnard (Teitelbaum 55). In this endeavour he embraces the freedom of Abstract Expressionism which was pervasive and omnipresent in the Canadian art world, if only to serve different ends for Ewen than for the Painters Eleven and their American abstract counterparts. He witnessed the incredible revolutionary fervour of his Montreal peers in his earliest painting years. Although his apprenticeship in painting took him through an automatist-inspired abstract landscape, he clung to the naturalistic notions of Goodridge Roberts, his teacher, rather than the love of French symbolist and surrealist traditions that informed

Les Automatistes (Teitelbaum 41).

When Ewen first isolates the Moon as his central subject, removing the orb from a familiar landscape-genre setting, the moon appears cartoon-like, simple and playful, like his comet in Halley's Comet as Seen by Giotto. Unlike Moon over Water I or II (fig. 7, 8) (1977), in Gibbous Moon (1980) (fig. 3), the moon almost fills the entire height of the plywood. The startling centrality isolates the moon from the larger sky of its familiar context. A thin, dark surround top and bottom of the plywood, seems to squeeze the glowing orangish ball, emphasizing the bulk of this massive space object. Thin strips of dark space tautly frame the ponderous mass threatening to pop its snug rectangle. The moon is a veritable sculpture carved in plywood space. A velvety intaglio of darkness either side sinks into infinity creating drama and pathos by contrast with the lone orb's glow. When seen beside the whimsical comet opposite in Monk's catalogue (75), Gibbous Moon displays a new, portentous dark beauty despite its cartoonish simplicity.

Ewen's full-sized moon is no longer recognizable as a landscape. In Gibbous Moon, the moon is taller than most people at approximately eight feet, and the monumental plywood image has the majestic presence of huge portrait with its head-like shape and feature-like cavities. Crude in shape, garish in colour, the glowing wooden object against murky, dark space is in stark contrast to the harmonious, romantic weather-drama of earlier cloud, moon or sun-dotted sky-and-seascapes like Cloud over Water (1979). The 1980 Gibbous Moon anticipates later moon works like Full Moon (1984) (fig. 5), by abandoning the cartoon whimsicality of the earlier landscapes and the hallmarks of the earthly landscape scene: cloud, land, horizon and water. If not a landscape, Gibbous Moon may have characteristics of a portrait but it is not a portrait of



anything human. Through movement, Ewen renders this large mineral form of life as compelling, vital and alive as any living creature on earth.

From 1980 on, the moon alone dominates Ewen's painted plywood: no longer just a familiar element in a larger scene. After 1980, stand-alone moons are interspersed with the more familiar moon-in-landscape compositions, but as the decade progressed the haunting, spectral moons became increasingly large and powerful. The gestural tempest that once filled Ewen's skies or water, now takes place mostly on the moon's giant surface. The spectacle is no longer the whole earthly panorama, complete with horizon. Instead, an immense, magical sphere packed with energy, floats freely, confronting its viewer by sheer life-sized immediacy. Ewen's moonscapes eclipse the earthly landscape by inserting their plywood universe between the viewer and their surrounding horizontal earth-scape. With their surrounding infinite, deep space, Ewen's moonscapes visually jolt us free of our land-based horizon and the formulaic representation of landscape that centuries of painting have firmly embedded in modern western minds.

The Moon is the central image in Day Moon (1981) (fig. 4); Full Moon (1984) and Full Moon (1990). The still, dark emptiness of deep space in the 1980 moons, becomes, in Full Moon (1984) charged with movement, teeming with energetic life: a life of atoms, molecules, light and space, visibly different from the movement in traditional landscapes' fleshy figures or watery weather. In the 1990 Full Moon movement within the moon is echoed in the surround. In Eclipse of the Moon, the energetic life that fills his moon visually saturates the space around it, swallowing the viewer into its magnetic space.

Ewen's solitary suns and moons that are not set within larger landscapes appear as if seen from directly across from them in outer space. Consequently the moon or sun is painted very large and nearly fills its square plywood support. In this non-rectangular format, Ewen separates his close-up planetary orbs from the majority of their land or sea-based predecessors in landscape traditions. The square is not typical of camera or easel pictures with their window-like shapes. It is a format more often used by abstract painters partly because its non-rectangular shape proclaims this intention to depart from the traditional horizontal landscape format. The square allows Ewen to nearly fill the surrounding deep space with the central image of his moon or sun. Robert Irwin quite naturally used a disc to create works about light as opposed to the illusion of perspective in traditional rectangular representations of pictorial space. Similarly Ewen uses the flattened central sphere with its equally flattened outer space all within a square that interrupts our expectation of deep perspectival illusion, and comes right up to the viewer.

Although monumental in scale, the highly personalized moons of Ewen's creation exude life with their lively surfaces exist in close proximity to their viewers. Ewen's moons effectively place their viewers in a direct encounter with a huge mass that most of us have never been physically close to. They impose on us a physical experience of being there, close to the moon in outer space, as we are close to our own earth when the moon has always been far away and high above. Even our brief close-up glimpses through television, satellite photographs and the telescope, only heighten our awareness of the vast distance that separates us from our closest neighbour in space. Photographs of the moon record the scale of the landforms on its surface accurately. In looking at lunar

photographs, we perceive a scale of physical details comparable to those of earth, and transpose a huge scale for the visual information.

Ewen doesn't attempt anything accurate or realistic; he simply makes the moon real by bringing its details of surface into a human-like scale we can easily understand and experience. Revealing the action of the making of the work, the router's scars in the plywood skin command our eyes to mimic the movements of the artist's arm with his creative tool. In so doing, we imbibe the energy of Ewen's creative act, in a vicarious way reliving his experience. The creation of the painting is continually replaying itself in the plywood like a loop. This replay of his router's frenzy is physically recorded in the ripped skin of the plywood more vividly than soft paint on canvas could ever hold the memory of human movement.

In contrast to the two dramatic Moon over Water compositions of the same year (1987), Half Moon appears almost unfinished. A creamy white ground, treated as an all-over, abstract field, appears, at first glance, silent, almost peaceful. As the viewer absorbs the frenetic storm of marks in Half Moon's white ground, the impression of quiet dissolves. Outer space appears in an avalanche swallowing everything with lightning speed in white swirls, as seen from within the eye of the storm. The static starkness of the ultramarine moon is a foil for Ewen's routed frenzy. The blue fragment of moon is threatened, soon to be consumed by the white blast. Wood and white warmed by Naples yellow harmonize, lending a skin quality to the show-through white paint lit by the underlying brown wood. In the upper left, the whirling machine trail of the router is rendered into thin, wiry gauze by contrast with smooth passages of thicker paint. Space is made into a fabric of machine marks and paint: rough gouges are woven into alternating

lace and lustre. Space here is soft, lush: the opposite of the harsh darkness that filled the lenses of Apollo's cameras (see Moon photographs in Appendix). Brown wood patches break through, interrupting the white sporadically like shadow-shapes glimpsed through a blizzard. The alternating positive and negative spaces pop in and out everywhere in this composition: in the flippant reversal of dark moon against white space, and in brown wood showing through the space storm -- the opposite of stars glinting through darkness, our accustomed view of dark heavens. In the composition as well, action itself is inverted: the surface of space is in motion - not the objects revolving in it. Here, as in the later Eclipse or Satan's Pit, the texture of space itself is featured. In Half Moon, the emphasis on space is achieved by painting the energetic activity in soft, light colours in contrast to the uncanny blue object with its heart-like gestural marks. The moon's blotches of carmine red suggest blood or flesh, lending the moon an odd, figurative quality. In their context of outer space, they hint of some form of creature but remain, finally, just paint. Ewen has hung his chunks of Bacon-esque abstract art out to dry, pinned to a plywood moon in a cool white tempest.

Punctures in plywood flaunt the artificiality of the artist's invention, enhancing the marvel of its affect. Wood's durability unleashes its strength despite the apparent recklessness of Ewen's gouging, in the sinewy reveal created by the router's passage through resistant material. A Morse-like code of black and white daubs in round holes punctuates a blue, Swiss-cheese moon with a staccato trail like bullets fired from a blazing gun. Potholes march from centre bottom through the moon and pop out again vaguely from cloudy whiteness, rising to the top of the plywood in a trail of gas or bubbles, joining moon with space in the continuity of round marks.

The trail of holes provides a focal point for a general building of movement from a quiet lower background upwards. The painting below the moon is somewhat opaque and develops into a hectic buzz of diagonal gashes and random activity in the upper background. Space is not snow. Yet there are qualities of a snowstorm in Half Moon that Canadians especially may recognize as a northern experience in a setting that would, otherwise, be empty. Ewen's vision has painted infinity with white, moving light as if the famous snowstorms of his days in London, Ontario and nearby Lake Huron have been transposed by memory to claim the farthest reaches of an outer space altered by the artist's imagination.

How does the movement in Ewen's moonscapes make the paintings into a world surrounding their viewers? The previous chapter developed the notion of movement as essential to our process of perception. Merleau-Ponty expresses the spatiality inherent in human action: "By considering the body in movement, we can see better how it inhabits space (and moreover, time) because movement is not limited to submitting passively to space and time, it actively assumes them, it takes them up in their basic significance which is obscured in the commonplaces of established situations" (*Phenomenology of Perception*, 102). The gouged evidence of movement engraved in Ewen's plywood surfaces mirrors the movement of moons through space and the motion of breath that brings life to our bodies moving through space.

The astonishing movement of a mineral or energetic life in Ewen's moonscape renders the moon's magical force compelling. In Full Moon (1984) he transforms the silent, immovable orb we usually see frozen by cameras into a wild, rolling ball of life. The rich Halloween colours glow like a lantern in the darkness of infinity. A molten fire

suggesting illumination from within is spilling onto the moon's surface. This fiery energy and action convey life and warmth on what Apollo's photographs document as a cool, grey, rocky realm. This earth-like depiction is obviously inaccurate, even unrealistic, and yet inherently true: there is energy and life hidden in the glowing mass of the moon — a force that draws oceans in its wake. How can this kind of energy be depicted by the trails of an electric router brushed with paint in a plywood sheet? This creative act is as astonishing as our revelation of a wonder that awaits us always far above our heads in the night sky. These manmade moons of Ewen's create an enhanced experience of wonder that may exceed our response to the familiar spectre in the starry heavens.

Ewen's moons after 1980 are life size and their surfaces detailed by one man's activity with his body. The visual evidence of his gouging activity still pulses with life and motion. The action-produced lines trigger the perception of the artist's movement during creation again in the path our eyes must travel; effectively reliving those movements by following their traces, like the pattern of dancers' footprints might convey the rhythm of music they danced to. Ewen brings the moon down to our scale and conveys its living presence through an energetically detailed surface teeming with life. With a magical shift of scale and great surface movement, he brings an almost abstract vision, once remote and untouchable, close enough to us that we might easily reach and experience it in a real, intimate, physical way: through touch.

In Full Moon (1990), a riot of colourful movement banishes the cardboard stiffness of the earlier Gibbous Moon for all time. The molten lunar surface carries into the adjacent outer space. There is not much left here to compare with a Canadian landscape as we know it and the volatile action of the expressive material has merged,

almost alchemically, with a fantastic gold and grey palette. The painting is entirely non-representational except for the illumination that holds Ewen's visual excitement clearly in the realm of painting, even if it fails to remain within the landscape form as we know it.

Half Moon presents an interaction between the moon and its surrounding space especially where the bluish colour bleeds into the neighbouring space suggesting a ghost or moonshadow drifting off into infinity beyond. This unifies the moon with space despite their different surfaces. In Eclipse of the Moon, the moon is clearly distinguished from its background. Or is it? In Eclipse gouges crisscross recklessly everywhere except the near-solid white crescent. In the black area they comb the entire shadow's surface and echo in bare wood beyond the moon's edge. The patterns and the wood reveals repeat around the white crescent, unifying a shadowed moon with its ochre background of space, despite the contrast of dark and light.

Gouges in the wood just beside the circumference set up an optical effect of rotation while creating a thin halo of light around most of the huge sphere. Our eyes follow the light in these gouges but it is unclear whether the moon is turning or space is revolving around it. Although they may be moving in different directions, the moon and space are visually united through the continuum of their textures and the common element of movement. A black shadow creeps irregularly into the white, an inky puddle ominously encroaching into dry, white sand. The still, white sliver is threatened on all sides by movement: in the infinity showing through its holes and in the darkness crawling across the moon's surface to consume the remaining light in its eclipse.

Despite the evidence of their man-made origin, Ewen's Moon series remain unconcerned with any human presence in the moonscape, or even in the earthly

landscapes. Humanity is not his subject even peripherally or through the fact of his presence. Ewen's expressive visions of the moon could only have been experienced by a human being yet the human being is not the point. Energy may be in us just as it is in everything in the universe, but in the moon that energy is most clearly present without us.

Ewen's skill in expressing his vision is everywhere apparent in these works but skill is a pale fact without the vision that inspires it. Ewen preferred to use scientifically captured data over direct experience (Monk 20) as starting points. What happened to these images within Ewen's imagination and memory transformed them almost completely from their documentary sources. Some referential details survive like the location of prominent markings on the moon's surface. In the 'Changing Notions of the Landscape' chapter, I explored Snow's 360 degree film shooting in a real landscape. Both artists are interested in an extra-terrestrial spatiality, and both use details captured by camera. However, Snow's work differs fundamentally from Ewen's imaginary moons because unlike Snow's film, Ewen's image is processed first in the artist's memory and then executed in a very manual method.

Gouging the plywood turns the flat illusion of the two-dimensional easel picture into a more three-dimensional object, like a geological specimen or excavation sample. The gouged support functions as bas-relief as opposed to most flat, two-dimensional work. The dimensionality of the carved surface provides an intimate visual and tactile access to the work in detail that many large, flat modern abstract works lack. Ewen synthesizes aspects of the physical experience of nature, providing the viewer with a visual sample big enough, sensual enough, to trigger an aesthetic experience with impact similar to that of an actual landscape.



Through the scale and surface execution, Ewen creates monumentality and a sense of living force fields of energy that appear to extend beyond the support (Teitelbaum 41). The viewer is immersed in the energetic field through the residue of activity in the gouged surface and the imaginative reconstruction through scale of the landscape components so as to make them all visible by one human being standing front and centre of the plywood. Ewen's entire body created the plywood's convex surface texture while he was making the work. The resulting vigorous, concentric marks draw the viewer into a physical position similar to Ewen's during the creation of the work. In proximity to the centre of the plywood, the viewer absorbs the experiential residue of the landscape/moonscape that has so enthralled the artist. This physical, sensual intimacy enhances the viewer's capacity to see what the artist has seen, and possibly receive an aesthetic experience comparable to the ecstatic vision he conveys.

In this sense perhaps Ewen may reveal a more direct descent from the Group and earlier Romantic landscape painting traditions than his contemporaries Snow and Weiland. No longer pursuing the naturalistic representation of the landscape, his innovations still reflect a romantic interest in atmosphere and light as aids to the spiritual or mystical revelations of nature. Yet he is informed by his contemporary abstract colleagues' approach to both picture plane and painting surface. The practice of enfolding the viewer in the visual field of the painting is part of the legacy of American Abstract Expressionism. In the previous chapter, Ewen's use of movement and space is compared to that of Mark Rothko as his counterpart in an abstract vein.

However, arguably Ewen's direct means are no less conceptually informed than his contemporaries' technologically innovative means, if only in a different sense. He too

has seen the Moon on television. He also lives in the expanded terrestrial vision of his fellow artists like Smithson. His acknowledged early influences include a strong attraction to scientific diagrams and charts, especially of the elements (Teitelbaum 62), as much for their observance of physical laws of nature as for their informative, striking, graphic imagery. The sky and night sky with its glittering contents of the larger universe is a frequent subject throughout his career. His acute interest in scientific views of the universe was followed in 1960 by a strong attraction to American artist Phillip Guston who used known images for their light and sense of place (Teitelbaum 55). Ewen, however, uses recognizable forms, not as landscape as traditionally is used, to represent or reflect things beyond it. His reduced iconography of earth, moon, landscape or seascape is a diagrammatic short form for this experience of nature. These simplified shapes are triggers for certain sensations and their accompanying spiritual or mystical experience.

### **Details and Scale Create an Experience of the Moon**

Kenneth Clark (11) quotes Cennino Cennini about a medieval painting tradition suggesting that an artist who wanted to represent mountains should take some large rough stones, still dirty, and uses them as models to indicate darks and lights. The use of details of smaller landforms, like abbreviations or samples of their larger counterparts, is something that artists have done since then. Ewen's inventive creation of gouged detail in the surfaces of his moon and sunscapes of the 1980's and early 1990's, continues this

medieval practice by adopting a more human-scaled sample of visual information to represent what would be otherwise too large and complex to display.

Ewen's contemporary application of this medieval method first appeared in his early 1971 constructions like Rocks Moving in the Current of a Stream and Thunderchain, where he used metal, bolts and pieces of rubber to depict details of natural phenomena<sup>xiii</sup>. The unexpected appearance of plywood rocks, or a chain for thunder, paradoxically heightens the real sensations triggered by these completely unrealistic, at least in literal terms, materials. The surprise of the industrial material in its new context, forces us to see in a new way, and to reconsider, the action of thunder or the movement of a stream in ways that traditional representation would not.

In more representational depictions, once we have labelled the thunder or a stream we mostly stop experiencing it. It may be that we do not experience anything beyond recognition in our normal image recognition process. At best recognition may summon memories of actual experiences of thunder or streams. For many of us educated in the West in the 1900's, our earliest and most frequent experience of images as pictures in textbooks and more fleetingly on television, are of images used to instruct, sell or entertain. In the course of our education, we have learned to process images for their associative symbolic functions to obtain instruction or information. We may not truly see an image for its own qualities but we remember an experience through our association of an experience with that image. The associated symbolic function acts as a trigger for the memory. Quantum mechanics and physics have done much to explode our historical notions of our universe and human perception. The mysteries of energy and matter that quantum theories explain beneath the visible surface of the universe have their parallel in

mysteries of human perception. Perception and memory are explored in the previous chapter for their application to an understanding of Ewen's works.

With Ewen's constructions of 1971, and in the equally imaginative moonscapes of the 1980's and 1990's, the recognition of the symbol is rapidly displaced by the startling novelty of the new experience. In Ewen's lunar images, if we recognize the Moon, we certainly do not recognize this experience of it. Through visual immediacy, by their scale and their individualized expression, as Teitelbaum has written, we are "seemingly, given access to an image otherwise unknowable...we are invited to engage with something outside of ordinary experience which nevertheless completes experience" (79).

Teitelbaum discusses Northrop Frye's notions of humanity's use of astronomy to give order to space (79). Mapping the sky, measuring distances and heavenly spheres are attempts to make sense of space and render what seems ephemeral (the heavens, infinity, space) more real. By charting the mysterious heavens, we reinforce our sense of more concrete space here on earth, and connect the remote Moon, stars and planets to their adjacent space, infinity, as if they were extensions from our space. Through this astronomical linkage, we connect, at least in imagination, with infinity. This has the effect of anchoring the incomprehensible expanse of the universe to our concrete earth.

Since human exploration of space, and especially since physically touching the Moon (via astronauts and satellite cameras acting as humanity's surrogates in making actual contact) we have, at least in our imaginations, attached or incorporated these previously untouchable, distant mysteries into our smaller, finite, recognizable world. The world's excitement in the unimaginable fact of Neil Armstrong's first lunar steps in 1969 had tremendous impact on our consciousness of deep space. The most obvious effect was

to render the Moon, and by implication, much of the universe, at once less mysterious, awesome and unknown, making it more commonplace, ordinary and familiar through the known fact of its accessibility. At the same time, this new physical intimacy (and it is significant that this intimacy was experienced primarily through visual means) with a previously untouchable, remote Moon, reduced the visual potency of its image, rendering its vastness into another territory of human conquering, a new colonialist subject or frontier. Conversely, for those with more vigorous imaginations, the visual images of deep space and the Moon obtained through exploration greatly enhanced our natural awe in the spectacle of the universe.

Ewen's imagination, fired by the inherent wonder of natural phenomena, embraced the momentous scientific events of his time. Yet he chose to grapple very physically with materials and paint to reveal in a timeless, hand-made, personalized image the resonant power of the Moon even in the aftermath of the documentary and objectively observed images now powerfully embedded in our popular consciousness. In the method of their making, Ewen's moonscapes more closely resemble ancient cave paintings than the vicariously captured lunar photographs obtained through technology. Although Ewen's earlier phenomena works from about 1970 were partly inspired by his early interest in science<sup>xv</sup> he references these sources more for their graphic aesthetics than for their scientific content.

In the Moon and Sun images after 1980, Ewen takes Cennini's simple methodology<sup>xv</sup> a step farther. He invents a moon that is near human in scale. Then he places us, the viewers, in space, in unimaginably close proximity, directly in front of the moon. In so doing, Ewen brings the Moon down to earth, placing it right in front of us,

or us in front of it, in distant space, or both. His vivid, substantial, large moonscapes are so palpably conveyed through the tactility of their gouged plywood that their immediacy creates the sensation that the viewer is actually there. If the viewers do not feel themselves to be there, in front of the Moon, they certainly feel that the artist has been. The viewer is acutely aware of the memory of Ewen's activity, like a human pulse, sensed but virtually invisible, that seems to be moving still, just beneath the skin of the plywood. So relentlessly has he woven the patterns of his mark making into the plywood that the overabundance of his expressive act commands our attention. Scarcely have we realized that this is an image of the moon before we are precipitously engaged, along with Ewen's hands, and the router, in a frenzied exploration of its surface and the active, moving, breathing space that surrounds its' now unfamiliar sphere.

### **Transformation of Material: Ewen's Hand-made Space**

Ewen's powerful transformation of plywood, an inherently resistant, rigid material into apparently gestural, moving, energetic lines creates the sensation of an entire surface teeming with life. In making the stiff plywood, built for strength and somewhat rigid, into something else - energy or movement or both - Ewen compels the viewer to ignore the mere fact - the banality of the plywood - and enter, through force of imagination and sensation alone, the realm of impossible, or nearly impossible, nearness to the Moon. We cannot empirically experience outer space. We can only do so in our imagination. Ewen's power as a visual artist is his capacity to create images that release our awareness from the

confines of mere fact to belief in the sensation that accompanies and/or creates awe when we are open to an experience of the universe's vast mystery and splendour.

Ewen's gouged plywood works have the effect of still being created right before us, so present is the action of the artist's body in making of them. The deep space around the moons is textured, like earth, and therefore "feels" real to our eyes. If we are capable of actually physically "feeling" deep space which is, by our definition, an absence of things, a void, an emptiness or nothing, how can we feel it by the same means we feel the presence of things?

Most of us are not astronauts. We have no physical experience of that nothingness, or void that we understand deep space to be. We imagine deep space and we feel it, if feel it we do, in our imaginations, as an absence, a ghostly, ambiguous thing we have no real experience of, and even then understand only by contrast with presence, which is how we are used to experience things. What use are symbols to represent a thing, or a no-thing, we have not actually experienced?

Even those memorable photographs and film footage of space have documented in a more recognizable way, the "look" of space than telescope images, if only by their use of a familiar and accessible medium—the photograph or television. One way we understand deep space is by its difference from our ordinary space full of things. Ewen conveys this emptiness paradoxically by creating its near opposite: a textured, tactile surface, like that of earth. In his moonscapes of the late 1980's and 1990's, the daunting emptiness of deep space becomes a lively field of energy and movement, palpable, concrete and sensual. It snuggles up to the moon and the whole picture is full of an

equalizing energy of movement that unites the object of the Moon with its surrounding void, as if they were made of similar things.

There is no longer the sense of the huge gaping void. Ewen's is an emptiness that brims with life, and in this friendlier, more recognizable version of space we can relax and get comfortable with our proximity to the moon and its mystery. In this textured, hand-made space we no longer fear falling into infinity, or disappearing, or being swallowed up by some unseen force or a black hole. This is a tangible, "real" world with rugged, touchable surfaces, even where we know there are none.

In Ewen's moonscapes, we recognize this space as something we can see because it is the opposite of empty - it is teeming with energetic activity which surely means life, and oddly, human life most notably, again where we know there is none. The evidence of recognizable life in a place where we know none to be is here, in Ewen's paintings: the deliberate marks of a man's making. In filling the void of space with life, and especially the act of creation itself, Ewen gives us a way of seeing, and feeling, deep space through its similarities to our earthly space. His is space we can feel and know. The actuality of their making is so vividly present that, like any strong memory, these paintings have the power to displace more dispassionately delivered images from the television or satellites<sup>xvi</sup>.

Ewen's imaginative, highly personalized interpretation of the Moon as an earth-like object calls upon several experiences in the unconscious and conscious minds of its contemporary viewers. Most of Ewen's audience has seen the once-unimaginable images of the astronauts in deep space, landing on the Moon. What this historical fact, and the visual images documenting the event have done, is to provide our visual imaginations with a memory of what space looks like, a memory we never had.



Prior to these visual experiences, most of us had only a vague, abstract sense of outer space derived from some scientific knowledge and visual images from telescopes. The telescope images were difficult to relate to without any relationship to our bodies or human forms, and no ordinary, familiar experience to compare them to. Once the astronauts touched down on the moon, it became a part of, or connected to, our earthly space. Now we have visually experienced a physical memory, however distant, and in terms we can interpret.

The Moon became real in ways that it never had been before. The figure of an astronaut provided a sense of scale or means to intuitively grasp distances and allow us to interpret visually the surface details of the moon. For ordinary lay viewers, non-scientists, these relatively poor quality images on film were more informative than the most detailed satellite photography. The relationship to a human figure, if only in the sense of scale it provided, instantly rendered comprehensible the vast scale of the Moon and the reality of its uninhabitation. This absence of humanity became so acutely comprehensible with the first human sight of an inhabitant where none had supposedly been before. The “emptiness” of space which we find difficult to understand even though the evidence of our senses so powerfully conveys it, became real when visibly attached to the foreground through the introduction of a human figure: the astronaut.

In Ewen’s plywood moonscapes, the distance between the moon and the viewer disappears. We, the viewers, are now, astonishingly, at eye level with the moon, and we may experience our once-distant neighbour orb in a casual, natural way as we might experience another creature or close, proximate feature of our earthly environment. This imaginative re-arrangement of our visual space breaks with the traditional picture

window effect of looking out at the landscape through the picture as through a window.

We are out in the moonscape, along side the moon and off in space away from this earth's landscape.

Transporting the viewer to join the moon in space is like the visionary process. In "Eye and Mind", Merleau-Ponty describes the imaginative transport through which our bodies and minds spatially interact with the universe: "We must take literally what vision teaches us: namely, that through it we come in contact with the sun and the stars, that we are everywhere all at once, and that even our power to imagine ourselves everywhere--"I am in Petersburg in my bed, in Paris, my eyes see the sun" or to intend [viser] real beings wherever they are, borrows from vision and employs means we owe to it" (187). In the same passage, he articulates how we view ourselves as separate beings when we are a part of a larger Being: "Vision alone makes us learn that beings that are different, 'exterior'; foreign to one another are yet absolutely together, are 'simultaneity'" (187). The perception that takes place within an experience of vision may demonstrate aspects of quantum mechanics, an underlying principle that all things exist together in time and space and we randomly select certain experiences or objects over others. Whether or not that is the case, our vision is not ordered by a geometric or Cartesian construction of space. The space in our vision is not mechanical but spiritual: it is the space of all creation and not limited to local mathematics. In our vision we join the energy and motion of the cosmos, a general movement much larger than the mere rotation of one planet around its sun, or our individual human movements on this earth in one sense of its time.

The router-engraved surface of the moon and its surround—an equally tactile, gouged sky, become at least visually familiar or knowable to our human perceptions by several means: the scale of their surface details, so obviously man-made yet reminiscent of patterns created by erosion, and other natural effects of wind, water and weather. In scale, the slightly larger than human size of the image becomes, through optical perspective, more nearly our size when we stand, as viewers are apt to do with these large works, a feet in front of the works.

As has been discussed earlier, the central position of the artist's body when creating his works, and his physical activity in carving into the surface, has the effect of drawing the viewer in to the centre of the plywood, naturally assuming the position occupied by the artist during creation. At roughly eight by eight feet (243.8 X 228.6 cm) most of his Moon series works are monumental. Certainly they are very large, large enough to generate the awe that real natural wonders may command. As small as Ewen's moons are in comparison to their actual counterpart, they are huge in comparison to the small orb we glimpse with our naked eye in the distant night sky, or the size the moon may appear in a photograph in a book.

This tiny moon is the one we are most familiar with, even though close-up satellite photographs of the moon have now become part of our everyday visual experience. Most of us have seen these close-up images in books or on television screens, at eight by ten inches or perhaps a few feet in each dimension, far smaller than Ewen's plywood works. Even for those who have seen the moon close-up on a larger scale in an IMAX theatre or other cinema, our most frequent sighting of the moon is still the

distant, tiny sphere in the night sky, perhaps a fraction of an inch if measured with our fingertips.

The possibility of experiencing the moon as we would a tree, or any close feature of our own landscape, as substantial, tactile, observed with great energy and detail, just a few feet from our eyes, and at arms' length if we were to touch it, is inherently astonishing. Ewen's moonscapes exceed the associative symbolic functions of landscape as it has been most frequently employed in western pictorial traditions of the last few centuries. He is introducing us to a direct, visual experience of the moon that we have never really had, unless we have had some similar experience here on earth. The scale of Ewen's works provides the viewer with the opportunity to have a very physical sensation of encountering the moon, not as an easel picture of a landscape mimics the small, framed view from a window, but as a partially three dimensional object – an object one nearly bumps into, like a tree, a large boulder or the side of a hill - solid, textured, wooden and alive.

Just as a cross-section of the earth revealed in a rock crevice might display the evidence of geological life that created its surface, the manufactured, textured evidence of Ewen's act of creation reveals similar activity. Through this direct correspondence we may associate the experience of these works as much with geological views into the insides of the earth's living, evolving surface as we do with static, non-living works of art. The viewer feels as if they are seeing "into" the moon's surface. Ewen's large-as-life details, the gouges, have this effect. These details are rendered in a scale very similar to that at which we might have observed the details of our own, much more familiar landscape. Whether the moon is or is not like our earth, Ewen's works allow us to feel the

moon as we would feel a feature of the immediate environment we observe closely here on earth. In so doing he renders a near-impossible experience, believable, physical, immediate and familiar.

Ewen asks the viewer to recognize the moon in a familiar blend of natural and manufactured materials: plywood. He has made his moon at once real and totally imaginary or artificial by transforming the mysterious, distant spectre into a rugged construction of paint and building materials, rendering the moon simultaneously poetic and oddly prosaic. This rough, handmade moon with the energy of its creation permanently recorded in its surface becomes recognizable, though we have never seen it looking like this before.

### **The Uninhabited Moon – Last Wilderness**

In his caption for Eclipse of the Moon, Teitelbaum points out that although the moon is not a human creation; our pictures of it are (79). Amazing photographs, gathered via telescope since the advent of photography, familiarized modern humanity with the observable characteristics of the moon - another sphere not so different from our own, except for one thing - the presence of life as we know it. The unimaginable mystery of a pure wilderness untouched by humans before 1969 is not a quality that can be captured by photography alone. We can't see forms of life through the telescope, but that doesn't mean that a photograph proves they aren't there. We know they're not there through scientific observations and deductions, but photographs don't explicitly

demonstrate this. Strange visible similarities to earth incongruously combine with the moon's inhabitability, at least by humans. This is not clearly demonstrated by photographs. Similarly, the photographs of the earth taken from the spacecraft, do not demonstrate human presence on the earth either. The scale of most images of these orbs from space, images we can readily see with our eyes, precludes the small details that would reveal a human presence. We, and the things we build, are just invisible in these distant images.

The lack of visible habitation or inhabitation may not be a great issue in itself. But in order to experience the compelling mystery that has commanded our attention throughout time, it is necessary to do more than accurately record the moon's image. The magnetic draw of the lunar orb throughout time predates our modern collective scientific knowledge of its uninhabitation. There is a very real physical force that emanates from the moon, drawing the tides of our great oceans in its trail, as well as our imagination.

This physical force is far more dramatically presented in Ewen's rough, paint-drenched raw plywood surfaces than in the accurate, cool, spectral beauty of the most exquisitely accurate photographs. Ewen's moon paintings present not mere observations but an individual's active engagement with the powerful energetic presence of the massive physical object that is the mighty object of our vision. If only through the many ways they are so evidently not merely photographs, however spectacular such photographs may be, Ewen's crudely hand-made, man-made paintings, are far more passionately expressive of the physical, energetic magnetism of the moon as experienced through human eyes. Teitelbaum discusses the study of the skies, or astronomy, as humanity's attempt to render the ephemeral empirical by calculation and measurement, through celestial

mapping linking humans more firmly to this earthly space (79). Our scientific observation of the moon and the sky only enhances Ewen's pursuit of its ephemeral qualities.

This gouging in, as opposed to piling on or building up, reminds us of archaeological excavation or cross-sections, and by association, geology or science. Curiously, a young Paterson Ewen thought he would become a geologist, and he later studied geology along with fine art (Johnson 42). His works have the materiality of specimens, a sense they borrow from geology and natural history as much as the history of landscape painting. Ewen's gouging technique is not about the act of carving or the plywood material in the same way that Julian Schnabel's pottery shards embedded in paint were commentary on the history of painting or black velvet kitsch. However unexpected, the shards nonetheless replaced the paint as extreme impasto. Ewen's intaglio or reduction method of digging into the surface is the exact opposite of most 20<sup>th</sup> century painting focused on the material treatment of surface or the use of materials as an expressive device. Where he goes in, they go on, up, or onto. Robert Rauschenberg, Kiefer, Pollock and many artists who used action, objects, impasto or other materials, added to their surfaces, not subtracted. The results, though their images vary in most ways, usually make the material a large part of their project.

We cannot help but feel the paint even as we equally or perhaps more acutely sense the action of its application in a Pollock painting. In Ewen's plywood the action of creation is foreground, the paint and the plywood are background, its carved surface less seductive than gobs of flesh-like juicy paint. The paint is not the feature; it is there as colour appears in rocks: scrubbed, worn, rubbed into or staining the surface. The surface

and the movement it records are of vital importance. Paint is a detail of the surface skin like the colour of rock which has oxidised when its surface is broken, not the entire surface through and through to the support.

In a Pollock work, the skin is entirely composed of paint. A Kiefer work's skin may be composed of wax, lead, paint and earth, but it is heavy and supported by wood. The skin of Ewen's work is the plywood, and its relatively thinner paint application is more comparable to the natural pigmentation of some organic surface, in its penetration of the surface and its relative visual impact or importance. Like the tanning of leather with colour, Ewen's painting, and the colour element itself, is secondary to the richness of the leather itself or the gouged surface in Ewen's case. One work which most dramatically demonstrates this tendency in Ewen's plywood works, is Satan's Pit (1991) in which the bare wood of the plywood is unrelieved by any additional colour, and only by the fathomless black hole made by a piece of steel behind its empty centre.

The seeming unreality of the lunar experience becomes immediately real, and believable through this tangible, palpable, physical sensation created by Ewen's plywood works. He makes the moon more real, an intimate experience, by adding these "realistic" details that are real but not actually from the moon. His moon has been "touched" by Ewen, handled in a personal, manual way, during the making of his eight-by-eight-foot plywood sample-like moons. He personalizes the moon and in the process accidentally arrives at a universality that allows his fellow humans, as viewers, to more readily experience the moon. No photograph would do the same.



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Notes

- <sup>i</sup> Chinook 1:3 (Spring 1979); a publication of Weather Enterprises. Reference from Monk's notes, 30.
- <sup>ii</sup> On page 42, Campbell quotes the term "authentic symbolism" in passages from Bernard J. Boelen's text Existential Thinking: A Philosophical Orientation (Pittsburg: Duquesne University Press, 1968), 124. (Ref. in Campbell's notes, 57-8).
- <sup>iii</sup> Davis's endnote for the first reference to Underhill's book includes the date of its first publication in 1914 (171).
- <sup>iv</sup> Davis traces Whitman's influence through author James Cappon (43), mystic R.M. Bucke (44) and Frederick B. Housser (50).
- <sup>v</sup> Chave quotes Rosenblum's discussion of Rothko as part of the Northern Romantic painting tradition in the context of landscape, along with Caspar David Friedrich and J.M.W. Turner, from Modern Painting 10-11 and 212-18. She also quotes Rosenblum's discussion of Rothko's sublimity from "Abstract Sublime", 353.
- <sup>vi</sup> See Teitelbaum, 61 as per note xiii.
- <sup>vii</sup> I hazard this guess based on a lifelong experience in curating, printmaking, printing and publishing of original graphics. In addition to my knowledge of printing, I have made close inspections of several of Ewen's plywood works before arriving at this conclusion. The account of Ewen starting out to make a woodcut and deciding to leave the painted wooden block as his final work is from Johnson, 41.
- <sup>viii</sup> Ewen qtd. in Johnson, 45. The passage is quoted later at the end of the chapter, 40.
- <sup>ix</sup> Teitelbaum writes of Ewen's "lifelong interest in British painting, particularly works by Constable and Turner" in Teitelbaum, Matthew, ed., Paterson Ewen (Vancouver and Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre, 1996) 72.
- <sup>x</sup> "Off to the Moon," Life 4 Jul. 1969: cover.
- <sup>xi</sup> Wainwright.
- <sup>xii</sup> Wainwright.
- <sup>xiii</sup> Teitelbaum, 61. Teitelbaum ascribes the use of these materials to the influence of London artists: Ron Benner with plywood, Dorene Inglis with sheet metal, and Dave Gordon with stick-on stars. Although the use of the materials may have been suggested by his peers, Ewen's use of them was entirely intended for a different purpose than the conceptual, idea-based exploration of his London associates: to create a spiritual and aesthetic connection to natural phenomena.
- <sup>xiv</sup> Teitelbaum, 119.
- <sup>xv</sup> See first paragraph of "Details and Scale Create an Experience of the Moon", 58.
- <sup>xvi</sup> Teitelbaum, 155, provides quote from Ingrid Jenker Site Memory: Contemporary Art from Canada (Guelph: Macdonald Stewart Art Centre, 1991): "Ewen's paintings are similar to memory in that their actuality or 'presentness' has the power to displace that which has purportedly been transcribed." This catalogue was not readily available to check the page number of his reference.

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## Appendix



Fig. 1. Cloud over Water (1979), acrylic and metal on gouged plywood, 224 x 335 cm, Art Gallery of Ontario, plate 28 in Paterson Ewen: Phenomena Paintings, 1971-1987 (72).

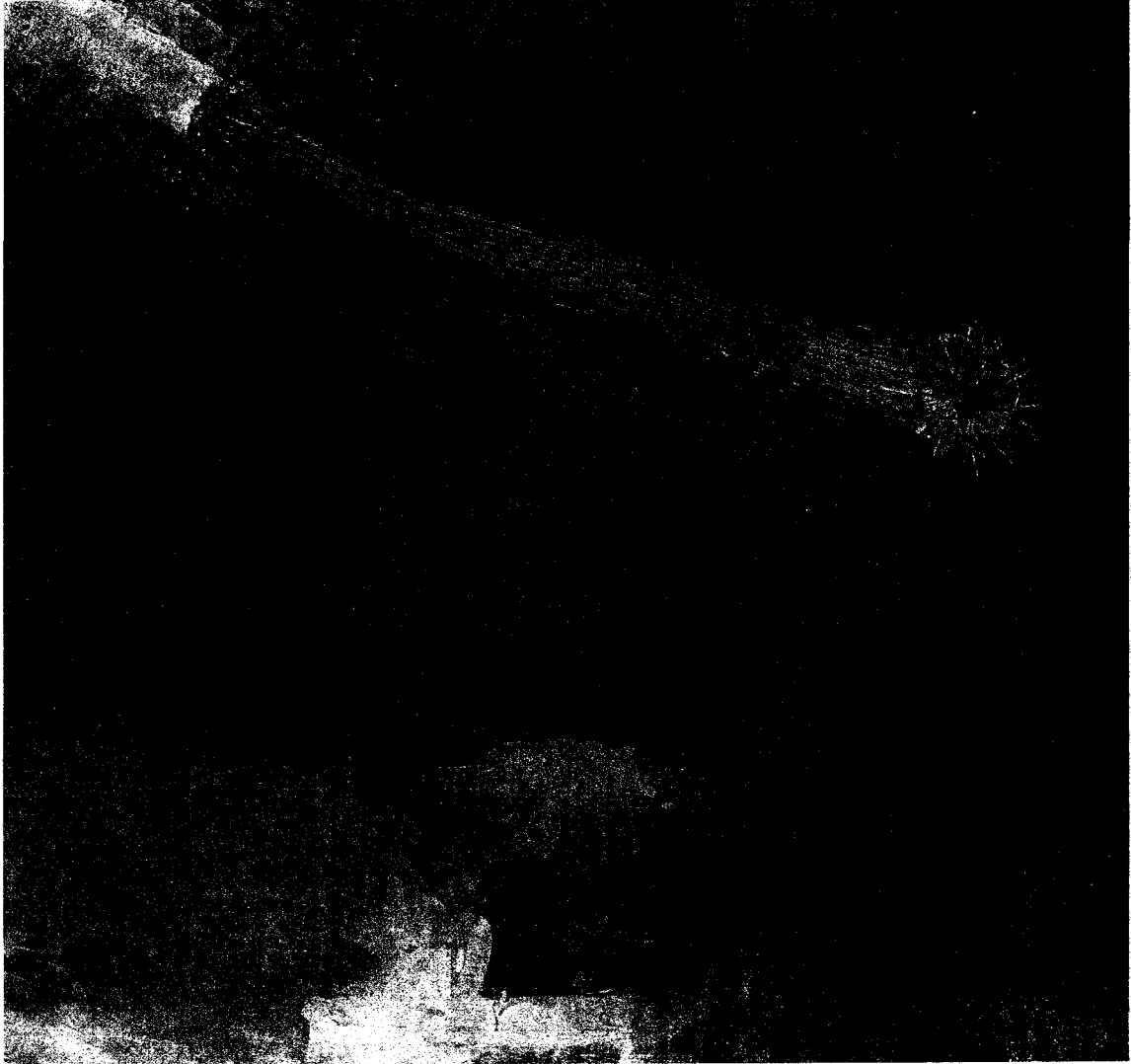


Fig. 2. Halley's Comet as Seen by Giotto (1979), acrylic and fluorescent paint on galvanized steel and gouged plywood, 229 x 244 cm, Art Gallery on Ontario, from Paterson Ewen (5).

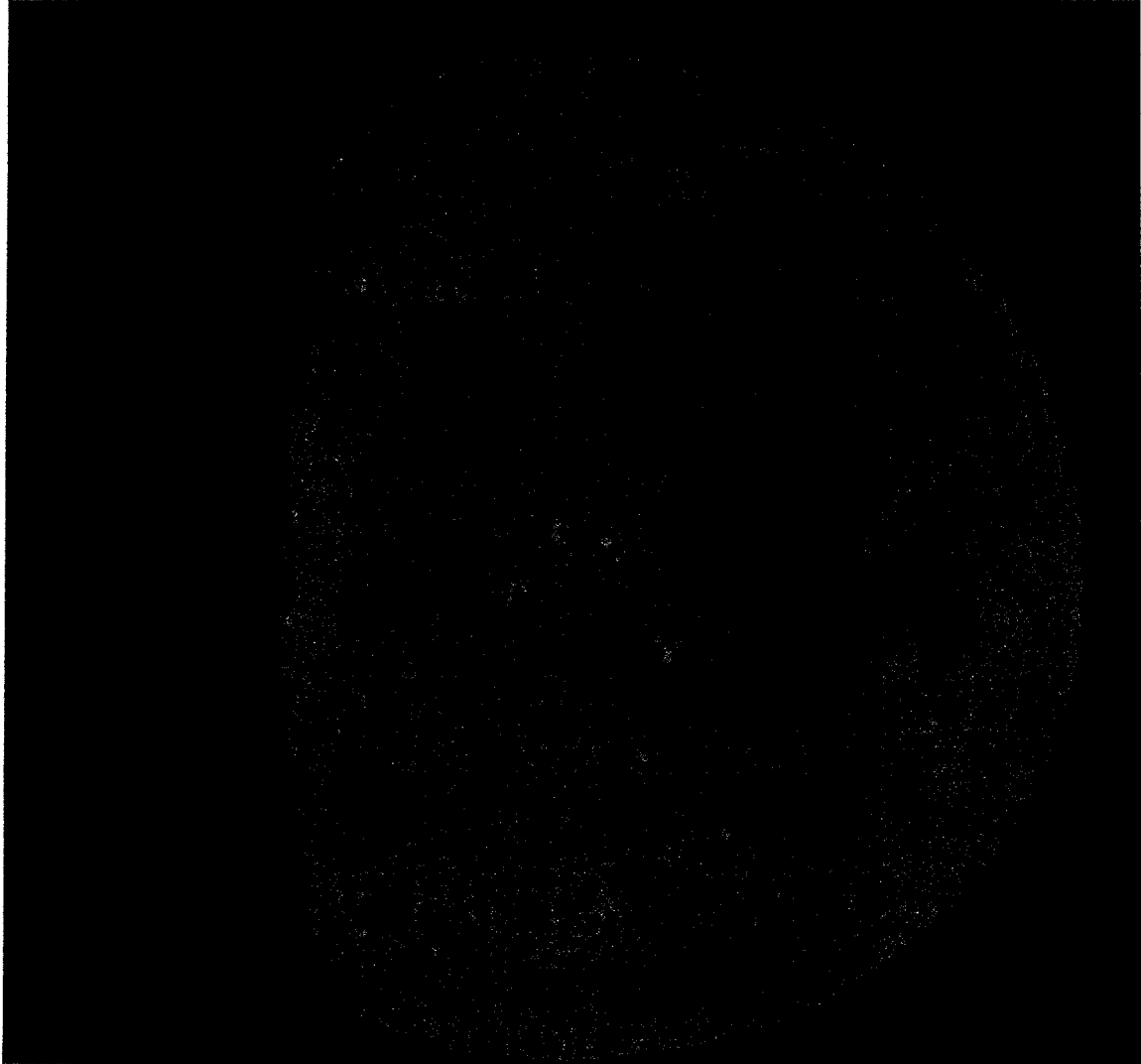


Fig. 3. Gibbous Moon (1980), acrylic on gouged plywood, 228.6 x 243.8 cm, National Gallery of Canada, plate 31 in Paterson Ewen: Phenomena Paintings, 1971-1987 (75).





Fig. 4. Day Moon (1981), acrylic and metal on gouged plywood, 228.6 x 243.8 cm, Carmen Lamanna Gallery, plate 34 in Paterson Ewen: Phenomena Paintings, 1971-1987 (79).

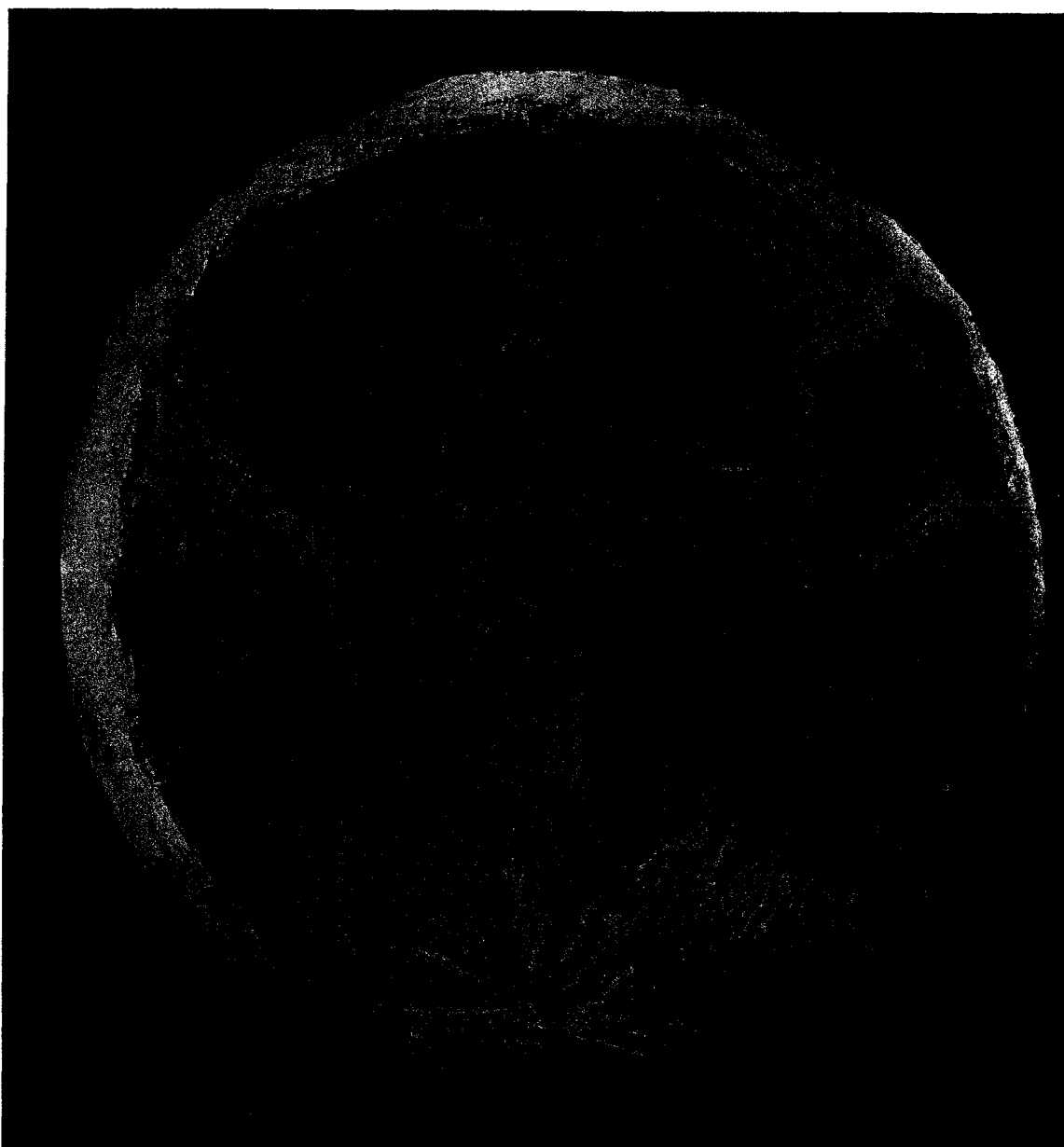


Fig. 5. Full Moon (1984), acrylic on gouged plywood, 243.8 x 228.6 cm, collection Garth H. Drabinsky, from Paterson Ewen (40).

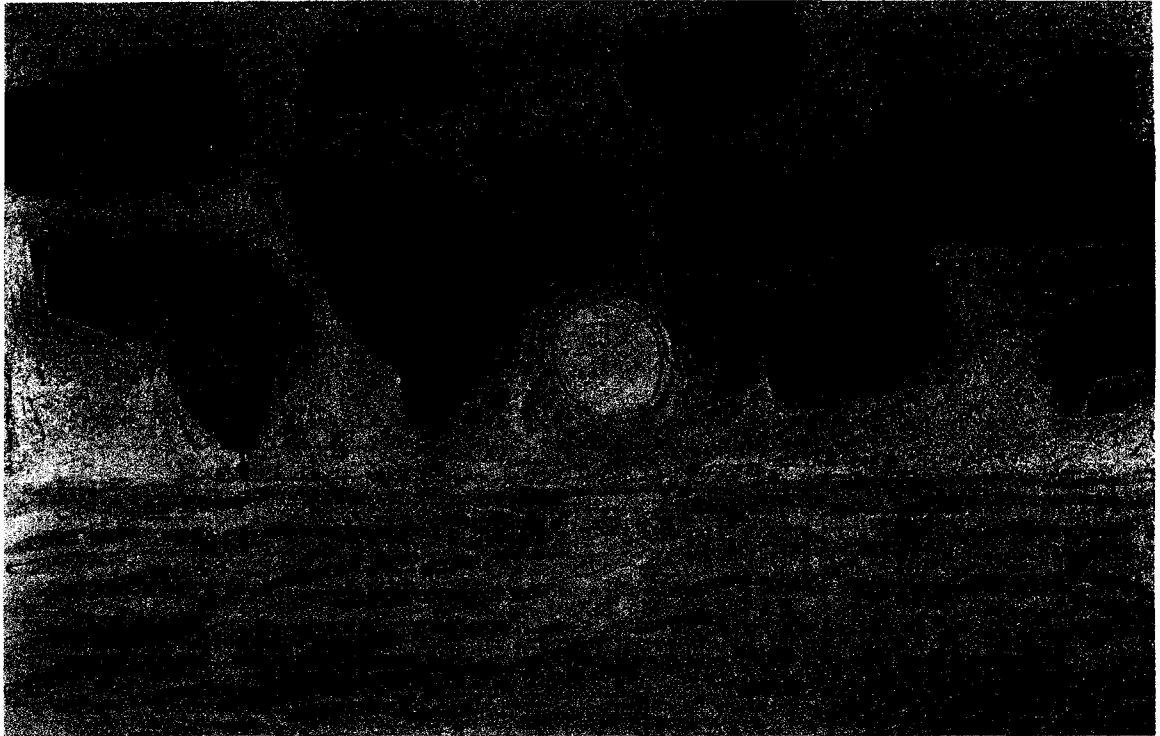


Fig. 6. Moon over Water I (1987), acrylic on gouged plywood, 228.6 x 335.3 cm, plate 45 in Paterson Ewen: Phenomena Paintings, 1971-1987 (93).



Fig. 7. Moon over Water II (1987), acrylic on gouged plywood, 228.6 x 243.8 cm, collection of J. Ron Longstaffe, plate 41 in Paterson Ewen: Phenomena Paintings, 1971-1987 (89).

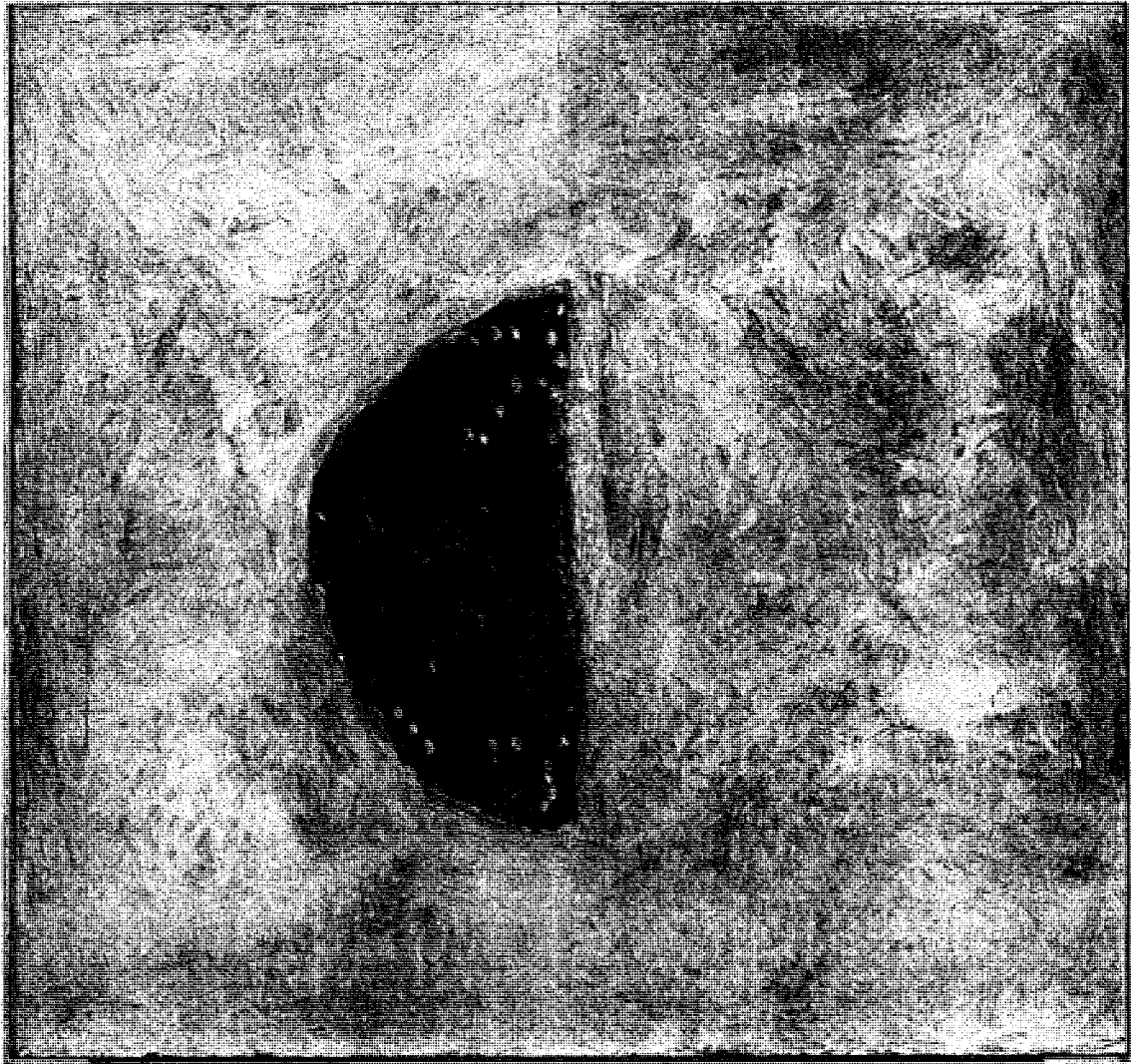


Fig. 8. Half Moon (1987), acrylic on gouged plywood, 228.6 x 243.8 cm, collection of Half Moon Collectors, digital photo by Geoff Scott/ Blindfold courtesy of Geraldine Davis & Company Limited, Toronto.



Figure 9. Half Moon (1987) (detail, upper right.)

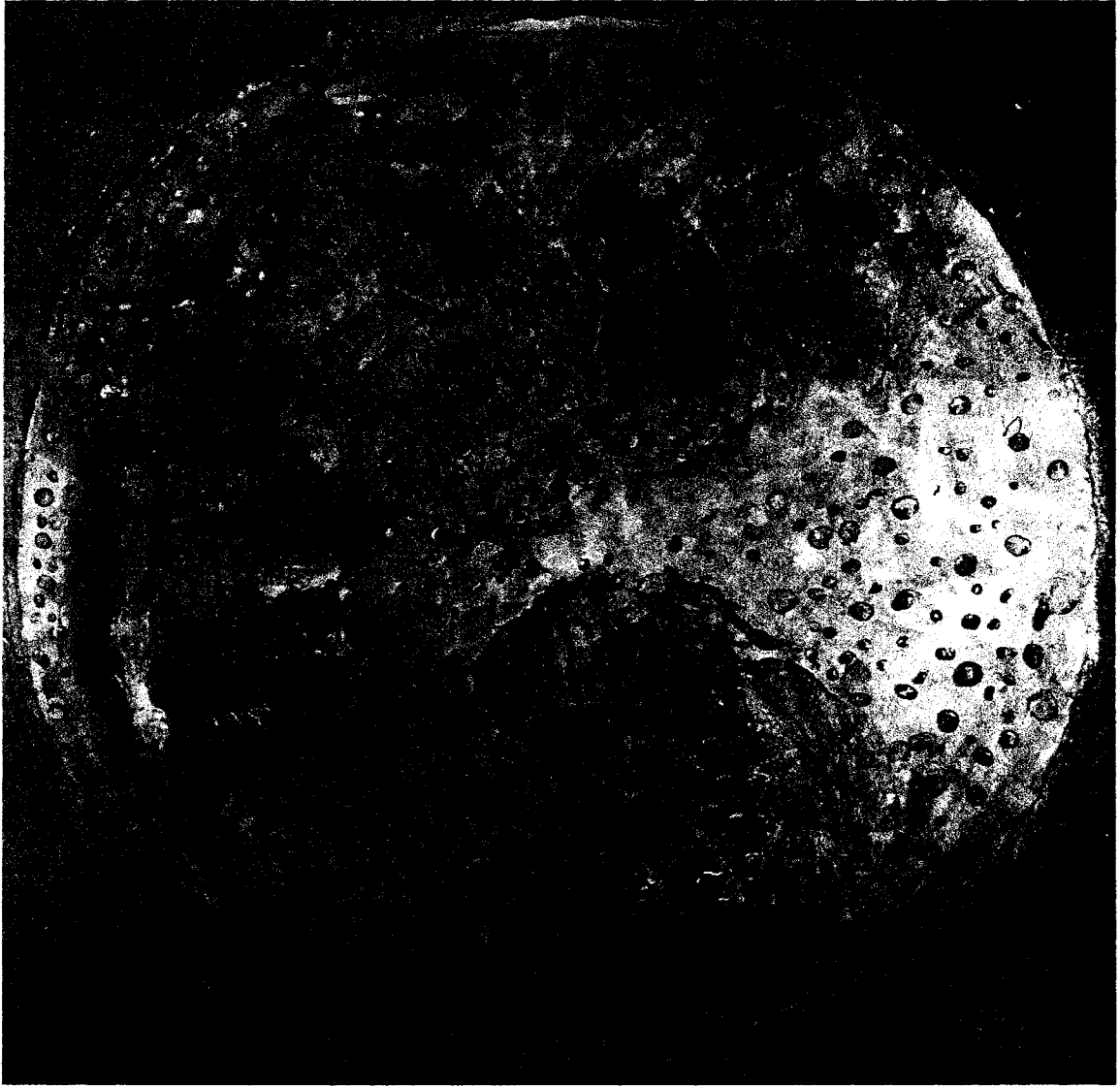


Fig. 10. Full Moon (1990), acrylic on gouged plywood, 236.2 x 243.8 cm digital file courtesy of Olga Korper Gallery, Toronto from Mary Handford's slide.



Fig. 11. Eclipse of the Moon (1990), acrylic on gouged plywood, 266.8 x 297.6 cm, Art Gallery of Ontario, from Paterson Ewen (78).





Fig. 12. Eclipse of the Moon (1990) (detail), see Fig. 11, Art Gallery of Ontario, from Paterson Ewen (91).

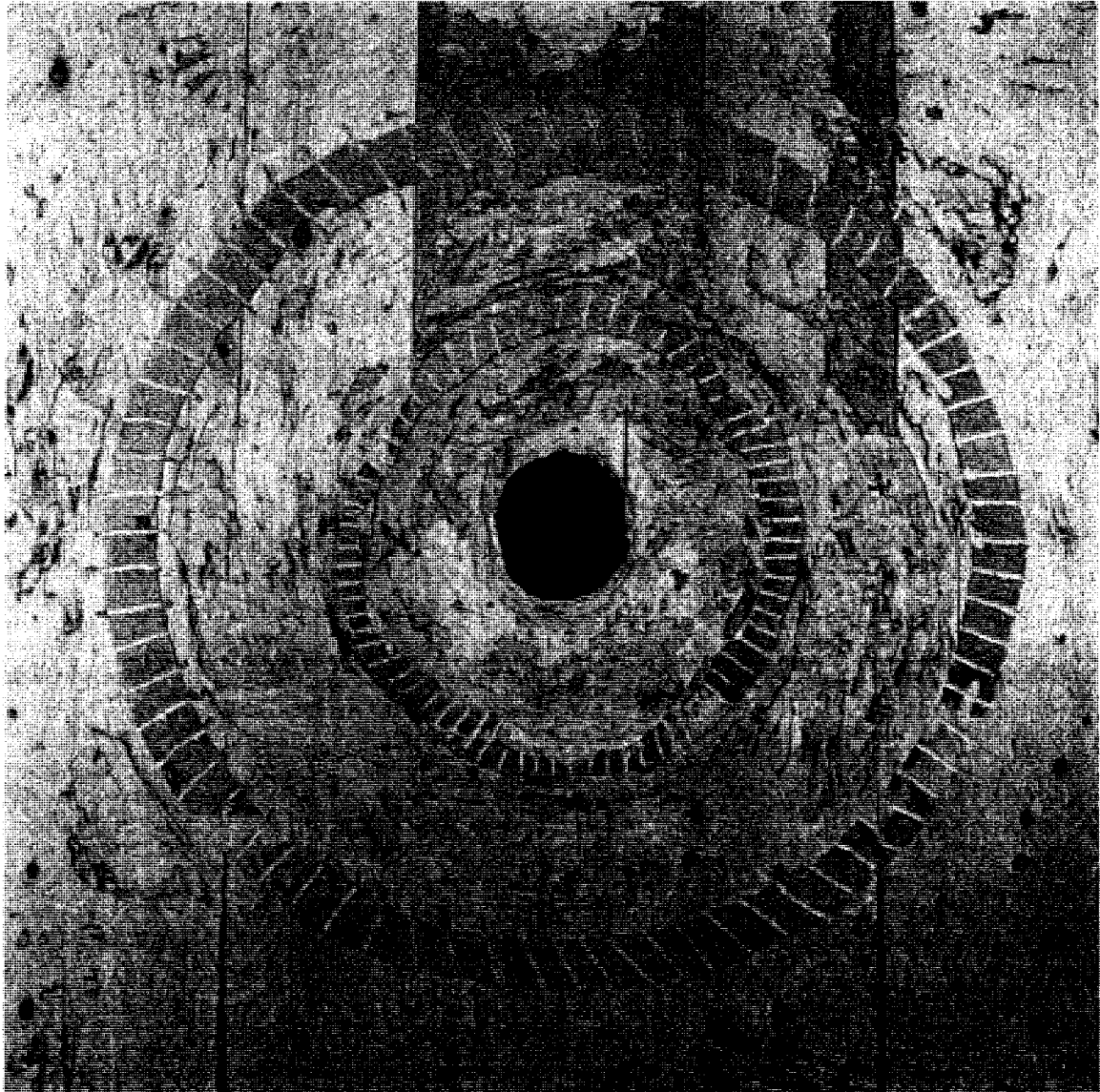


Fig. 13. Satan's Pit, (1991), coloured steel, bolts and acrylic paint on gouged plywood, 229 x 244 cm, Art Gallery of Ontario from Paterson Ewen (80).

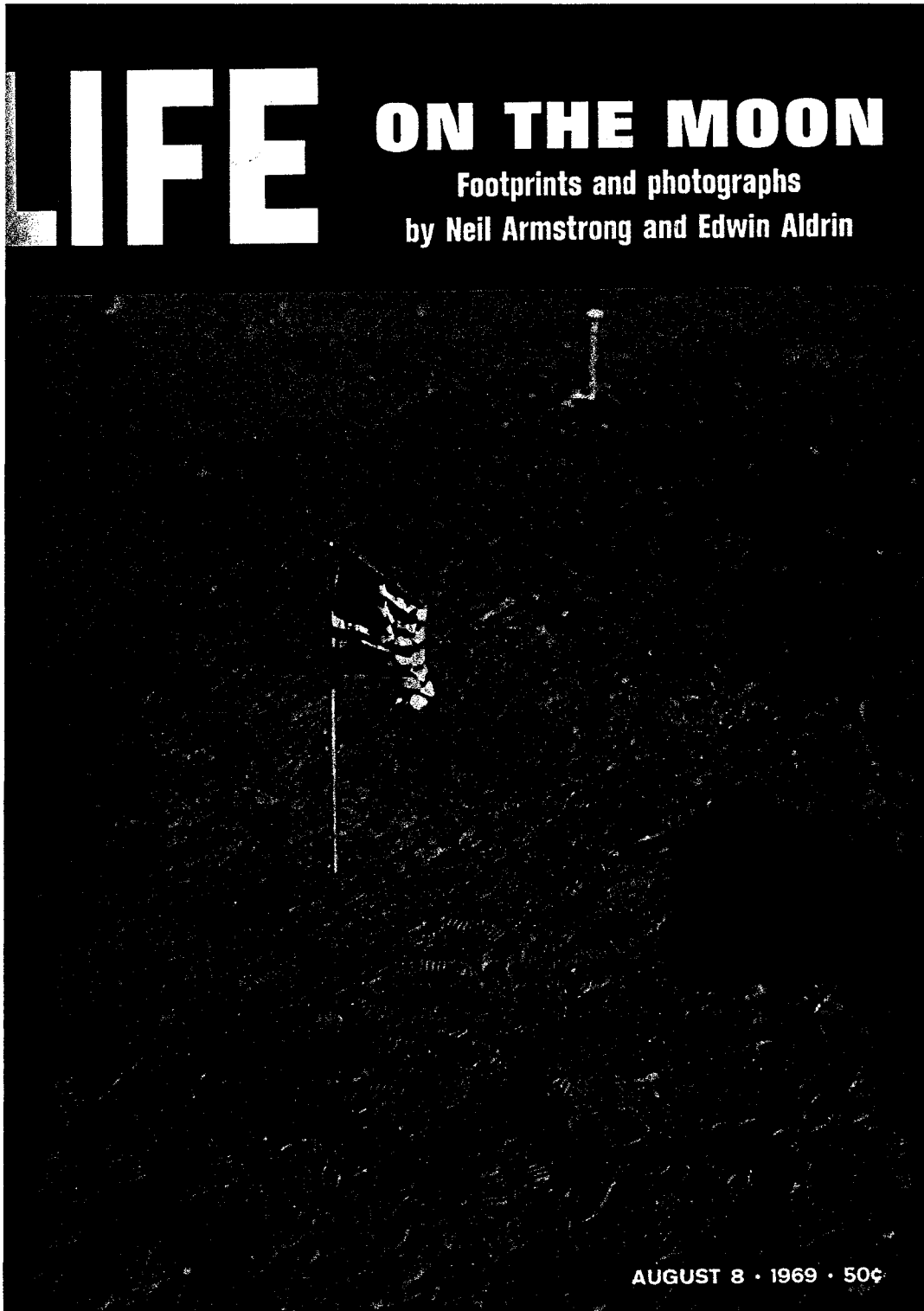


Fig. 14. Life 8 August 1969: cover.



Fig. 15. Full Moon. 30. "Earthrise seen for the first time by human eyes. Apollo II astronaut William Anders took this photograph...Apollo 8, December 24, 1968."

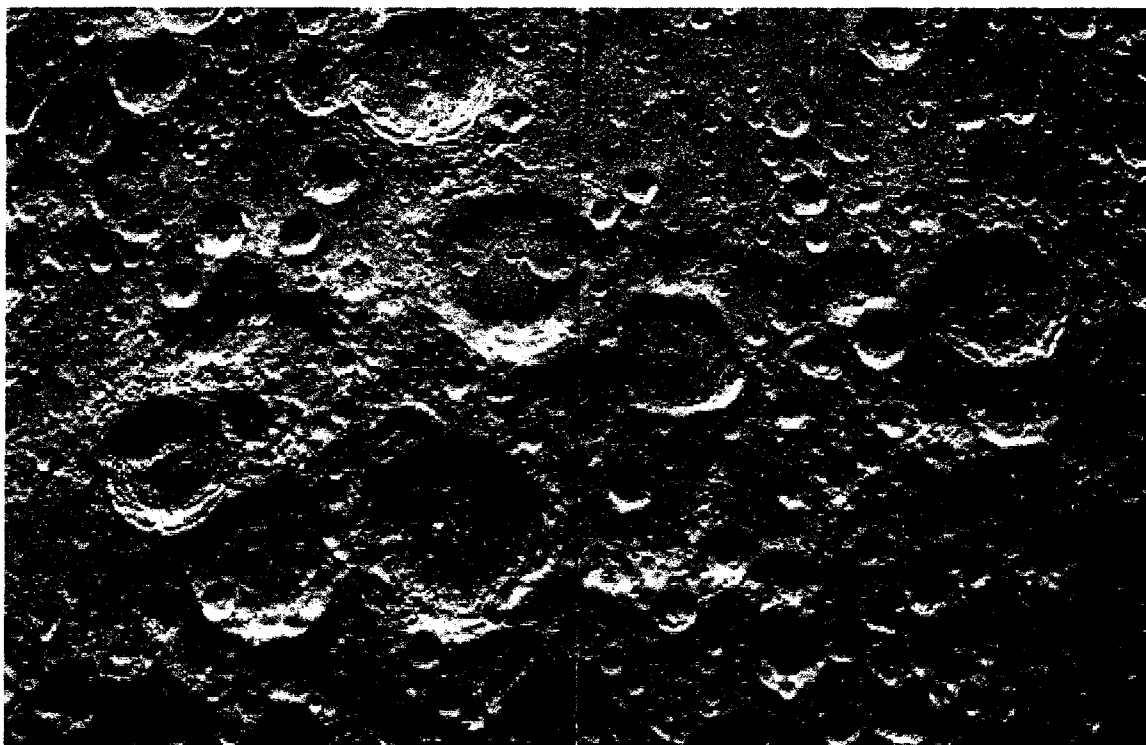


Fig. 16. Full Moon. 29 (detail). "An enlarged detail of the battered highlands of the lunar farside, seen from some 1,000 miles at the start of Apollo 16's return to Earth...Metric mapping camera black-and-white negative by Kenneth Mattingly, Apollo 16, April 16-27, 1972."

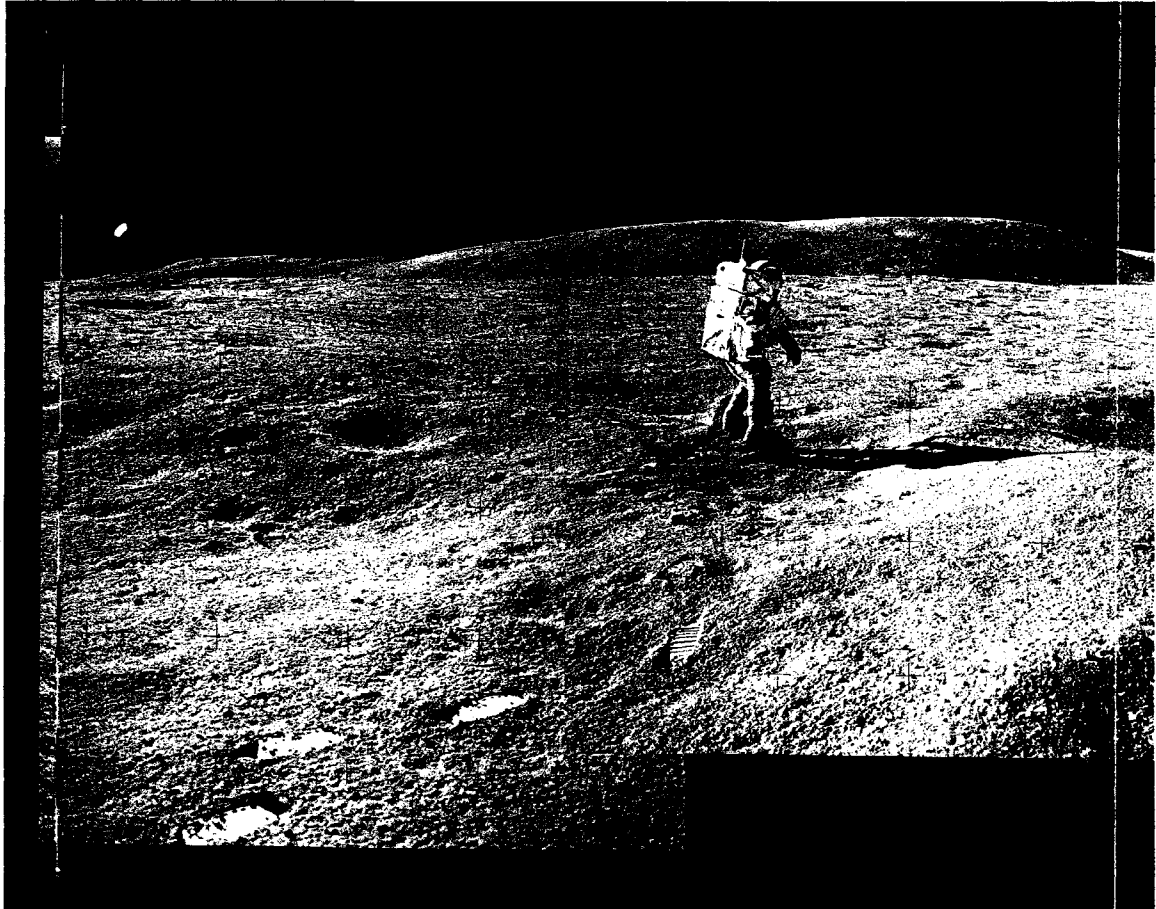
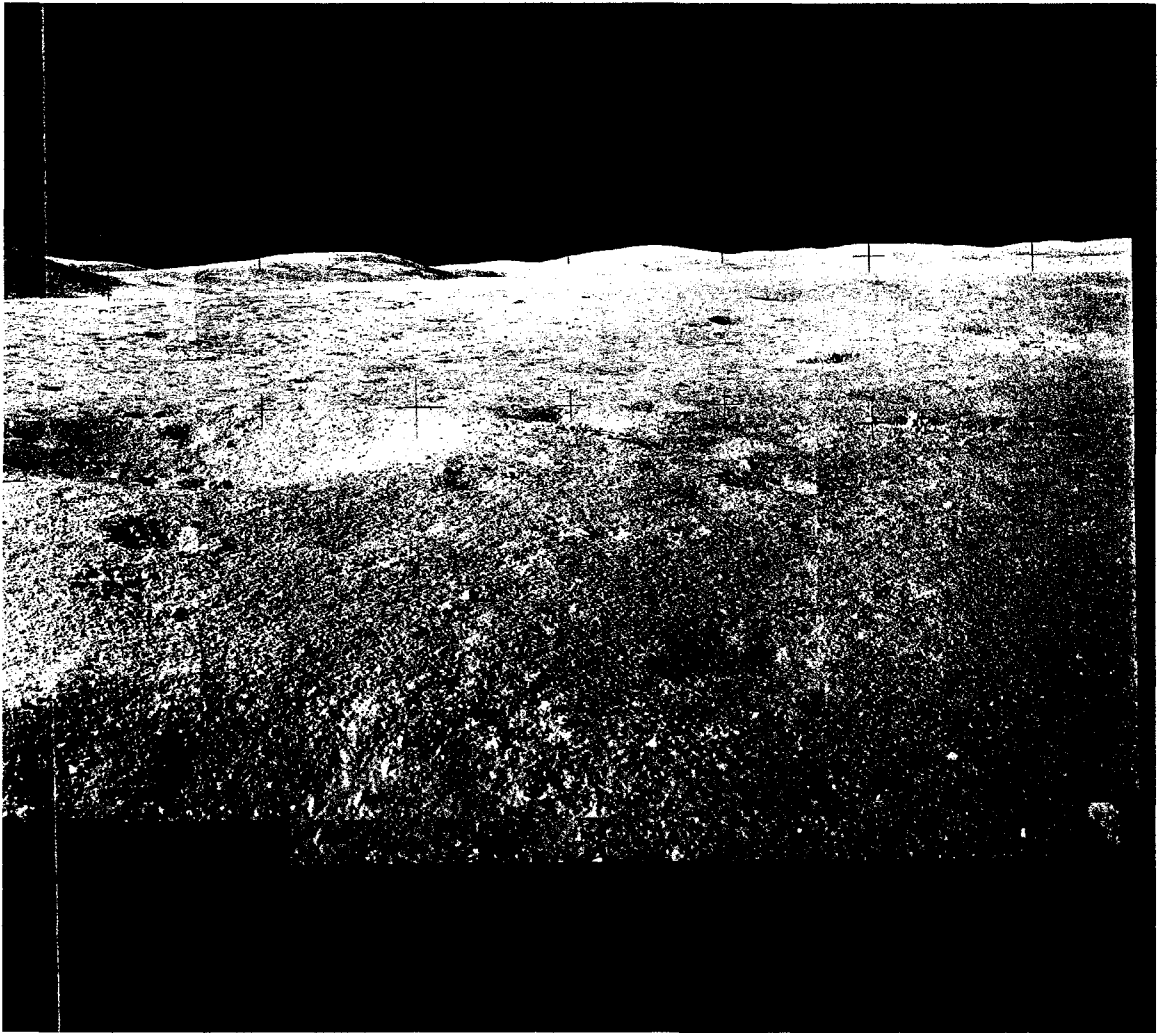


Fig. 17. Full Moon. 67 c, 67 d. (Following page). "Charles Duke...in a photographic composite of Apollo 16's first moonwalk...transparencies by John Young, Apollo 16, April 16-27, 1972."



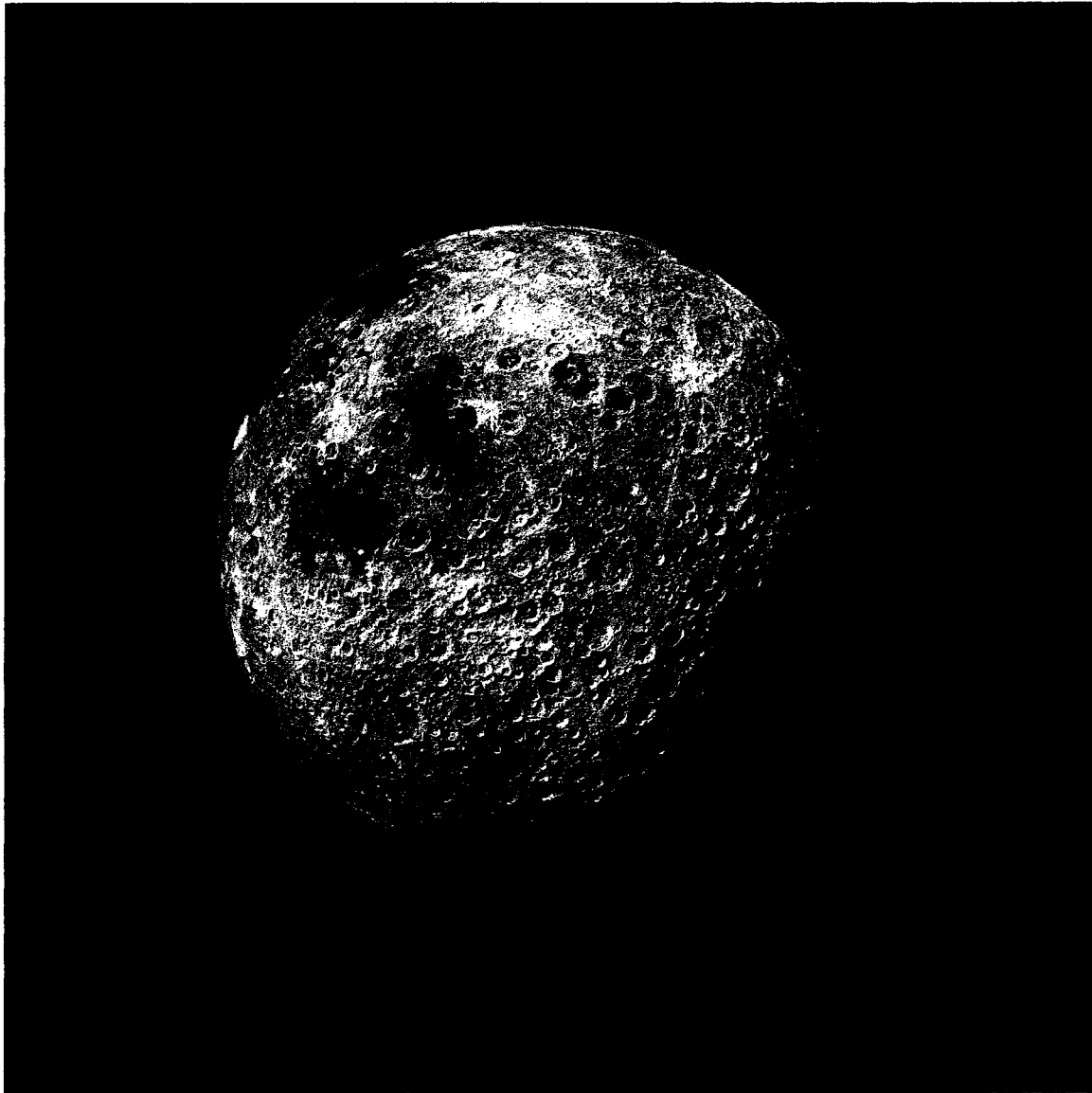


Fig. 18. Full Moon. 109. "A view of the Moon never seen before the space age, captured at about 1,000 miles as the astronauts began their trip back to Earth...by Kenneth Mattingly, Apollo 16, April 16-27, 1972."



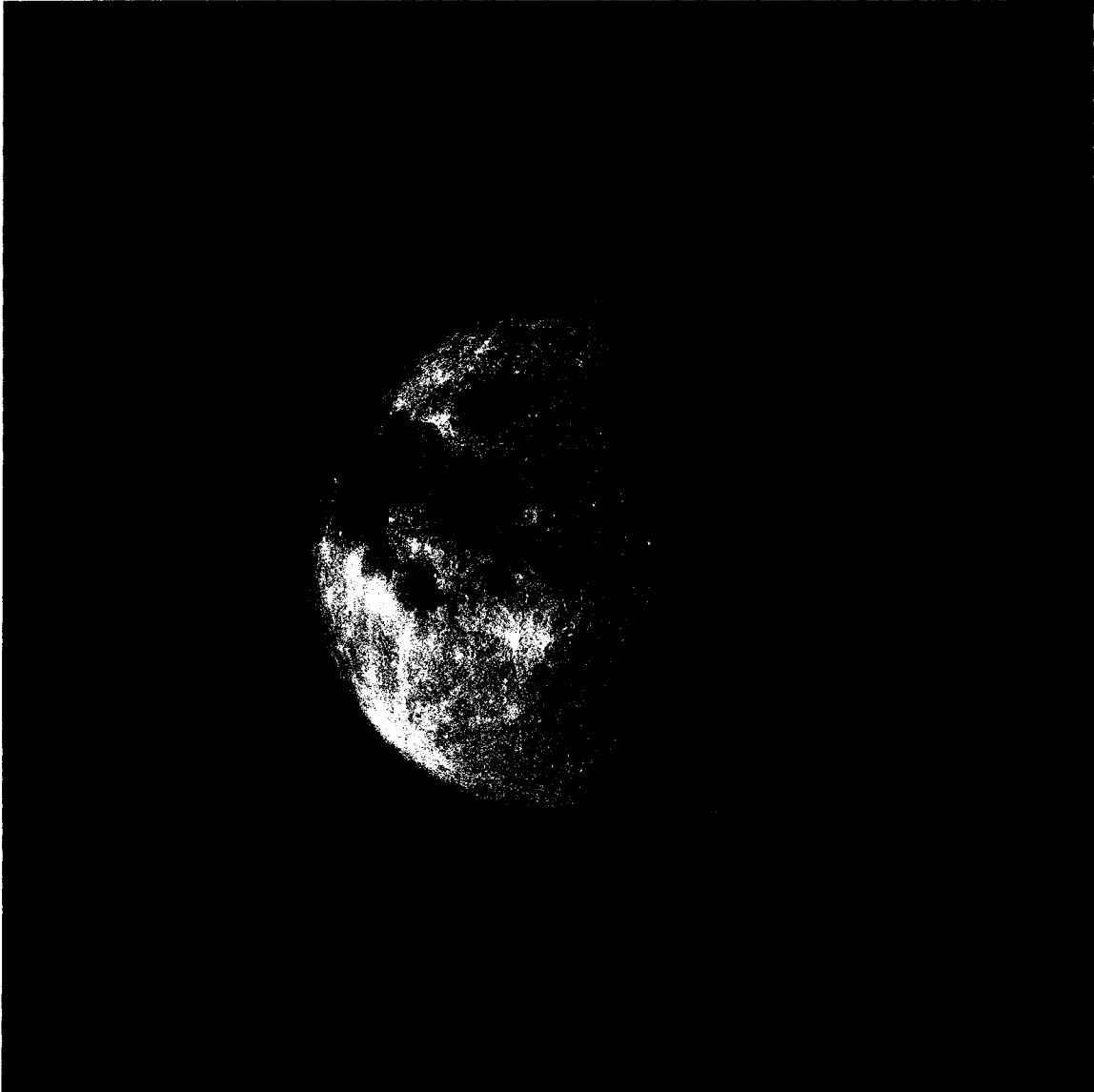


Fig. 19. Full Moon. 23. "A half-Moon seen from the command module on the way back to earth...probably by Alfred Worden, Apollo 15, July 26-August 7, 1971."