

# THE PLATES

WITH COMMENTARIES BY HARRY JACKSON



200. Jackson's Blackburn studio in Cody, Wyo., with Salty Dog ranch manager Mel Stonehouse (on horse), Jackson, painting assistant Mark Larson, and studio manager Gary Shoop. 1980

EARLY WESTERN SUBJECTS (1958–61)



201–202. *Trail Boss*. 1958. Patinaed bronze, 8¼ x 8 x 3¼"

*Trail Boss* is the second sculpture I ever made and the first one I had cast in bronze. The simplicity and the sense of life that comes through despite my beginner's clumsiness still pleases me. The first attempt fell so short of my dream that I damn near gave up. I didn't know about armatures, so the modeling wax refused to stay put (pl. 103). Before starting this second piece, I

found some small tubes of very stiff wax which I used to make the legs and it did the job. I did the whole piece in one long uninterrupted night's work.

He is a figure from my dream of a great painting about a cowboy being buried on the open range (pl. 244), and I felt it would help to first make a three-dimensional model. He is the boss of the trail herd that stampeded (pl. 256) and killed the young cowboy. His hat would never be off his head except to sleep, but it's off now for a few minutes to show his respect to one who "stayed."





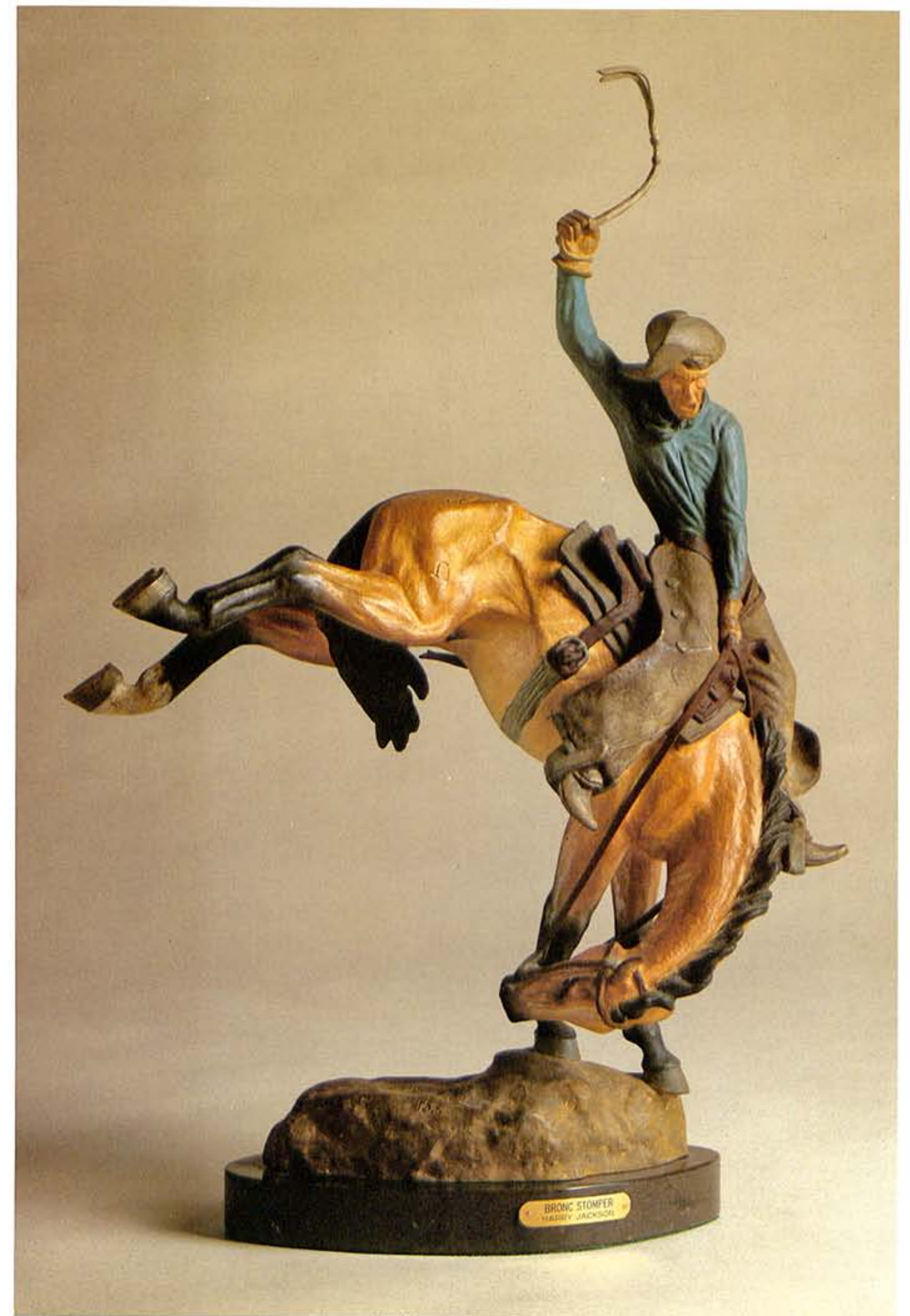
203–205. *Ground Roper*. 1958. Patinaed bronze, 10 x 5 x 4"

The night after making the *Trail Boss* I made this fella'. I'd started learning to sculpt four days earlier with the ambitious desire to do marvelously dramatic subjects like stampedes and range burials that I had never per-

sonally experienced. Now, I wanted to do a simple, routine one—something that I'd often done myself. It turned out to be a nameless hand waiting alone in the pre-dawn cold to rope an unwilling horse to saddle and ride in the morning's work. This apparently ordinary little figure has an honesty that all my more imaginative works would do well to equal.



206. *Bronc Stomper*. 1959. Patinated bronze. 17 x 13½ x 5½"



207. *Bronc Stomper*. 1968. Painted bronze. 17 x 13½ x 5½"



208-209. *Bronc Stomper*, details. 1959. Patinaed bronze, 17 x 13½ x 5½"

Bronc is short for bronco, the Spanish word for wild; and cowboys tack it onto horses and anything else that don't twist or break or bust their way. Now, when you need to bust a thing fast, you stomp it. So the hand who convinces horses to work their hearts out willingly, and does it in no time flat, is called a buster, a breaker, a twister, or a stomper.

The foundrymen liked my persistence, so they took the time and taught me how to make a wire armature for *Bronc Stomper* (pls. 206-209). I was also learning to "stomp" wax more effectively. Combining these two disciplines gave me this new freedom and exactness of expression. I was hooked.



210-12. *Salty Dog*. 1959. Patinaed bronze, 10 x 5 x 4"

The term "salty dog" meant a top hand before World War II. Today it will only get you a cocktail. I learned a lot doing *Bronc Stomper*. Now I could catch something more elusive. I wanted to express the inner character of the kind of man who is a salty dog.

He must be self-reliant and courageous, with lots of skill and no quit. He must be innately gentle and dominant at the same time, a man who's "horseback" even when he's afoot or lying down.

I was a babe that had just learned to walk. Now everything was possible. It was wonderful to make a physical object that showed those characteristics that still are my personal ideals—timeless ones I had learned as a boy from the salty dogs I knew.





213. *Steer Roper, Hard and Fast*. 1959. Patinaed bronze, 12 x 25 x 12"

It was mid-July 1959. I had completed the *Range Burial* bronze (pl. 233), taken it to Cody for the grand opening of the Whitney Gallery on May 1st, and returned to Italy to continue work on the *Stampede* sculpture (pl. 253). After six weeks of wrestling with that large composition, I really wanted a change; and I began this *Steer Roper* and two other small works at the same time.\* All three are as full of action as the *Stampede*; but they are as different from it as they are from each other.

A lone rider often has to throw and tie full-grown animals in order to doctor them. It is also a very popular rodeo event. In the arena, the roper's end of the lariat must be tied to the saddle horn "hard and fast," with-

out exception. But out in the hills, I've watched many a cowboy rope and throw cattle by merely wrapping the end of his rope around the horn a couple of turns (or "dallies"), and only tying hard after the animal is unquestionably down. I did both versions, *Hard and Fast* (pls. 213-14) and *Dally* (pl. 215).

My two earliest works were left rough simply because I was still too clumsy to do better. But I conquered the vagaries of metal armatures, and learned how to control and detail the wax surface in the ones that followed. Now I was free to choose the way that best expressed the spirit of the piece in hand. The surface of this bronze was worked very broadly and roughly in order to stress the extraordinary action in this everyday task.

\**Settin' Purty* (pls. 216-18) and *Ropin'* (pl. 221)



214. *Steer Roper, Hard and Fast*, detail. 1959. Patinaed bronze, 12 x 25 x 12"



215. *Steer Roper, Dally*, detail. 1959. Patinaed bronze, 12 x 25 x 12"



216-17. *Settin' Purty*. 1959. Patinated bronze, 16 x 10¼ x 6"

This is one of the three small pieces I did as a break from the demanding *Stampede* and the second time that I did a cowboy on a bucking horse.

In this piece I purposely left out all the detail in order to emphasize its simple overall form and motion. The miracle of determined rider and fighting horse becoming one in their lethal dance is what I wanted to say in *Settin' Purty*.



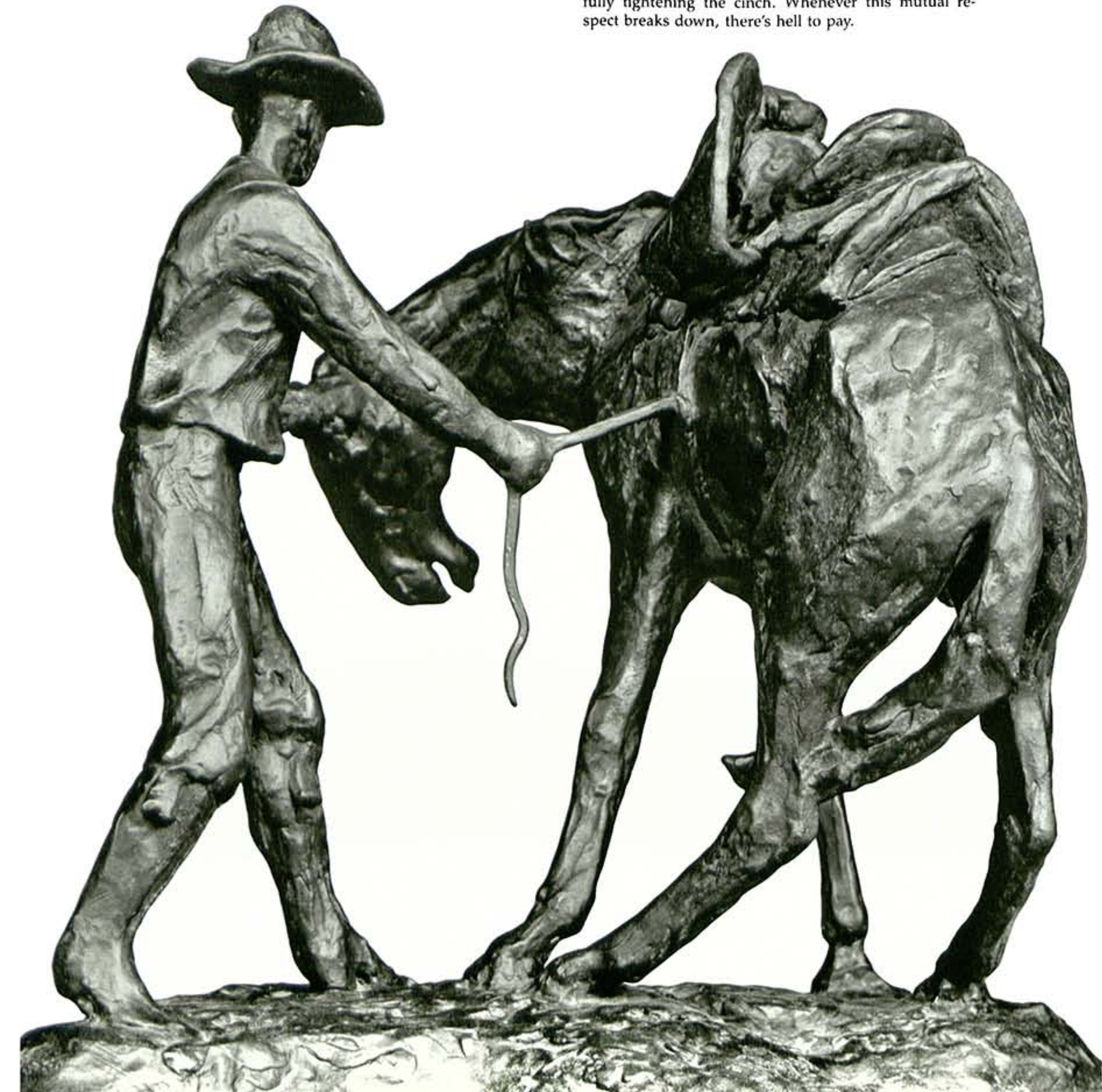


218. *Settin' Partu*. 1959. Patinated bronze, 16 x 10 1/2 x 6"



219-20. *First Saddle*. 1960. Patinaed bronze, 12½ x 11½ x 9"

The cowboy is saddling this trembling three-year-old colt who's never been ridden before. He weighs 800 pounds, is quick as a cat, with strong legs and jaws, hard hooves and sharp teeth, and a mind of his own. The cowboy pays him lots of attention; and he gets the colt's attention in turn by twisting his left ear while carefully tightening the cinch. Whenever this mutual respect breaks down, there's hell to pay.





221. *Ropin'*. 1959. Patinaed bronze, 13½ x 17½ x 5¼"

The *Ropin'* pair could be anywhere in cow country, alone, working on the open range or in town in a crowded arena.

Cowboys are proud that their work and their play are usually interchangeable at the drop of a hat and that all of it is hard and dangerous and takes enough different skills to keep a college busy.

"It's simple as hell, but it ain't easy."

222. *The Plainsman*. 1960. Patinaed bronze, 10 x 8 x 7"

Making portraits has always been exciting and *The Plainsman* was my first sculpted one. I wanted to make a certain strong type of Scotch-Irish head from imagination. When it was finished, it looked just like my old friend Bert Avery from the upper Greybull River as well as his son, young Bert, now over 70, living down on Bad Water Creek, who still loves to ride for days on end with no mind to the weather.

This portrait and *Lone Hand* (pl. 226) were studies for a larger sculpture never begun.





223-25. *To the Gods*. 1961. Patinaed bronze, 22¾ x 14 x 5½"

In 1960, Harold McCracken asked me to make a scale model for a monumental statue to go outside the newly proposed Plains Indian Museum in Cody. The museum did not become a reality until 1979, and my painted bronze *Sacagawea* (pl. 378) went there instead.

In *To the Gods* I wanted to express the spirit of the Plains Indians. Starting around 1550, these pedestrian tribesmen captured Spanish horses and became the greatest light cavalymen and mounted hunters in his-



tory. That was two hundred years before the cowboy. After two decades of living with this bronze study, I know that it is a monumental work and I will do it twice lifesize one day.

*Overleaf:*

*Lone Hand* (pl. 226) is the way the *Plainsman* (pl. 222) would sit his horse, relaxed and ready for anything. I made each of the shapes as simple and open and unadorned as possible, in order to reflect those same qualities within the man and the country.





226. *Lone Hand*. 1961. Patinaed bronze, 15 x 15 x 6"

## THE COE COMMISSION (1958–66)



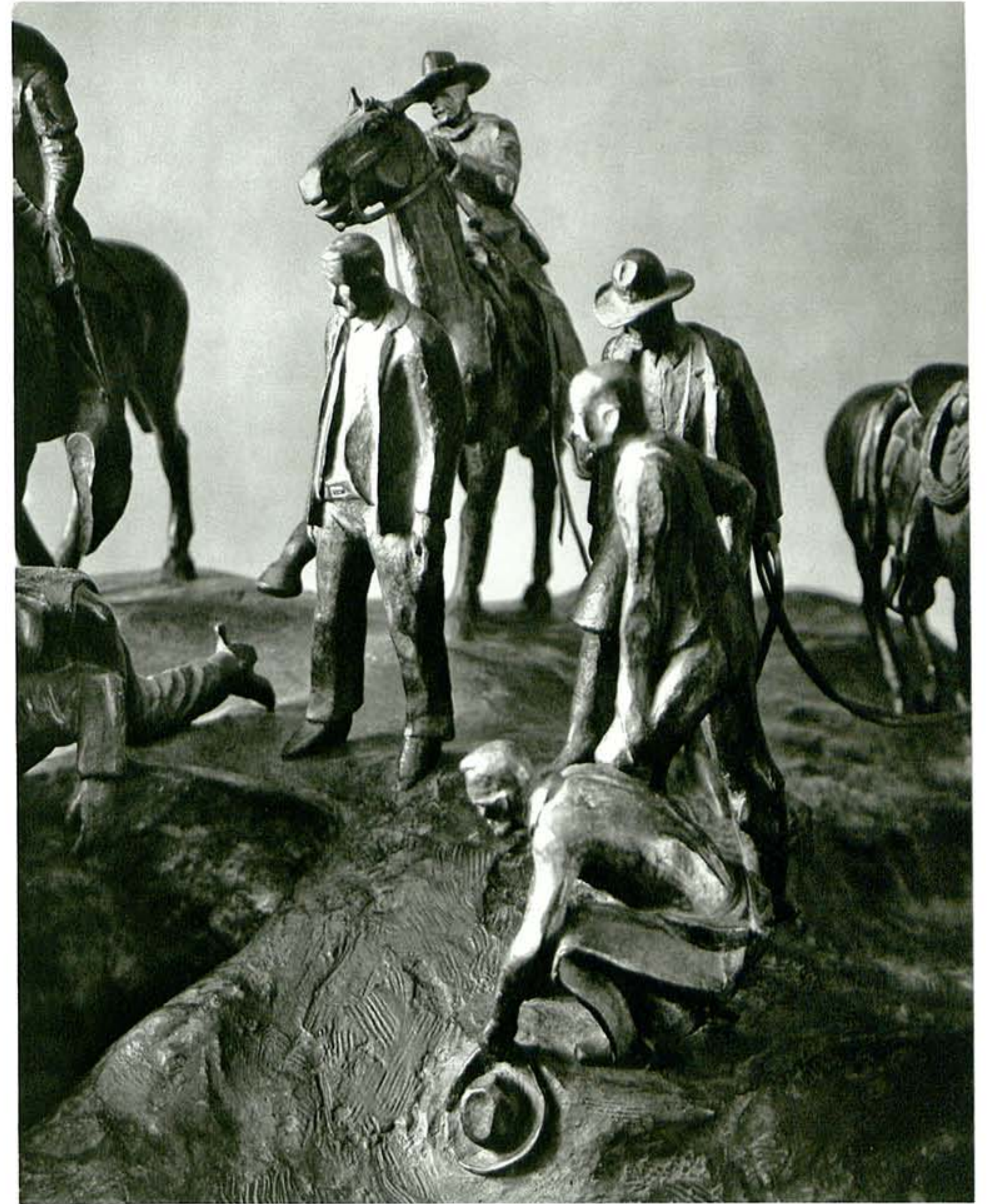
227–30. *Stampede* bronze and painting; *Range Burial* bronze and painting

When I went to Europe for the first time in 1954, I saw what I would call man-size work. I saw it right away in the Naples museum and then in the church mosaics and fresco cycles and the simplest images going back to antiquity—the sense of presence and dignity of single human figures that deigned to be in each other's company. That is what I wanted a painting to be, and no other subject or way of life offered that to me like my own American West.

In December 1957 my idea for two monumental inter-related paintings to tell the story of the old-time cowboy straight from his long ballads of cattle stampedes and lonely graves was enthusiastically backed by my friend Bob Coe from Cody, who was American ambassador to Denmark at that time. I was inspired by the sequential work of early church and Renaissance art as well as the example of Remington and Russell. Being equally at home on a cow horse and in the world's museums, Bob understood and said yes to the paintings. Four months later, when I wanted to make sculptural models before going on with compositional studies, he said yes again to the casting of these models in bronze. Then he and his brother Henry and Henry's wife Peg waited patiently and encouraged me during the eight long years I took to complete this ambitious four-part commission.

I was obsessed with the idea of the *Burial at Ornans* by Courbet. I dreamt about it night and day—about the dark, austere landscape and the presence of death

among people I seemed to know from my life in Wyoming—and I felt that if I could solve that in the *Range Burial*, the *Stampede* would happen. I began by making broad, rough studies in wash and tempera. They didn't do what I wanted, so I started to learn to be a sculptor, making the burial bronze first and the stampede bronze second (pls. 233 and 253), which is actually the reverse order of the narrative itself. Out of those came the two paintings (pls. 244 and 256), keeping the spirit of the sculptures but much different in form. From the beginning I did individual figures, first from the overall sculptures—*Center Fire* (pl. 234), *Fly Time* (pl. 252), and *Hazin' in the Leaders* (pl. 259)—and then in connection with the paintings—*Gunsil* (pls. 238–40), *Where the Trail Forks* (pls. 241–43), and *Cowboy's Meditation* (pls. 245–46). The whole thing has been like a wellspring for me. I wanted to focus on certain figures like you might single out someone at a gathering to get to know them better, and still keep the large feeling of the barren landscape and the isolated but close communication between the men. Each new work evolved organically into a new generation of work, flowing back and forth between the sculptures and the paintings, each time creating a new dimension and bringing the two mediums closer together. My work has continued to develop toward creating a single form of expression that combines both painting and sculpture.



231-32. *Range Burial*, details. 1959. Patinated bronze, 15 x 43 x 23"

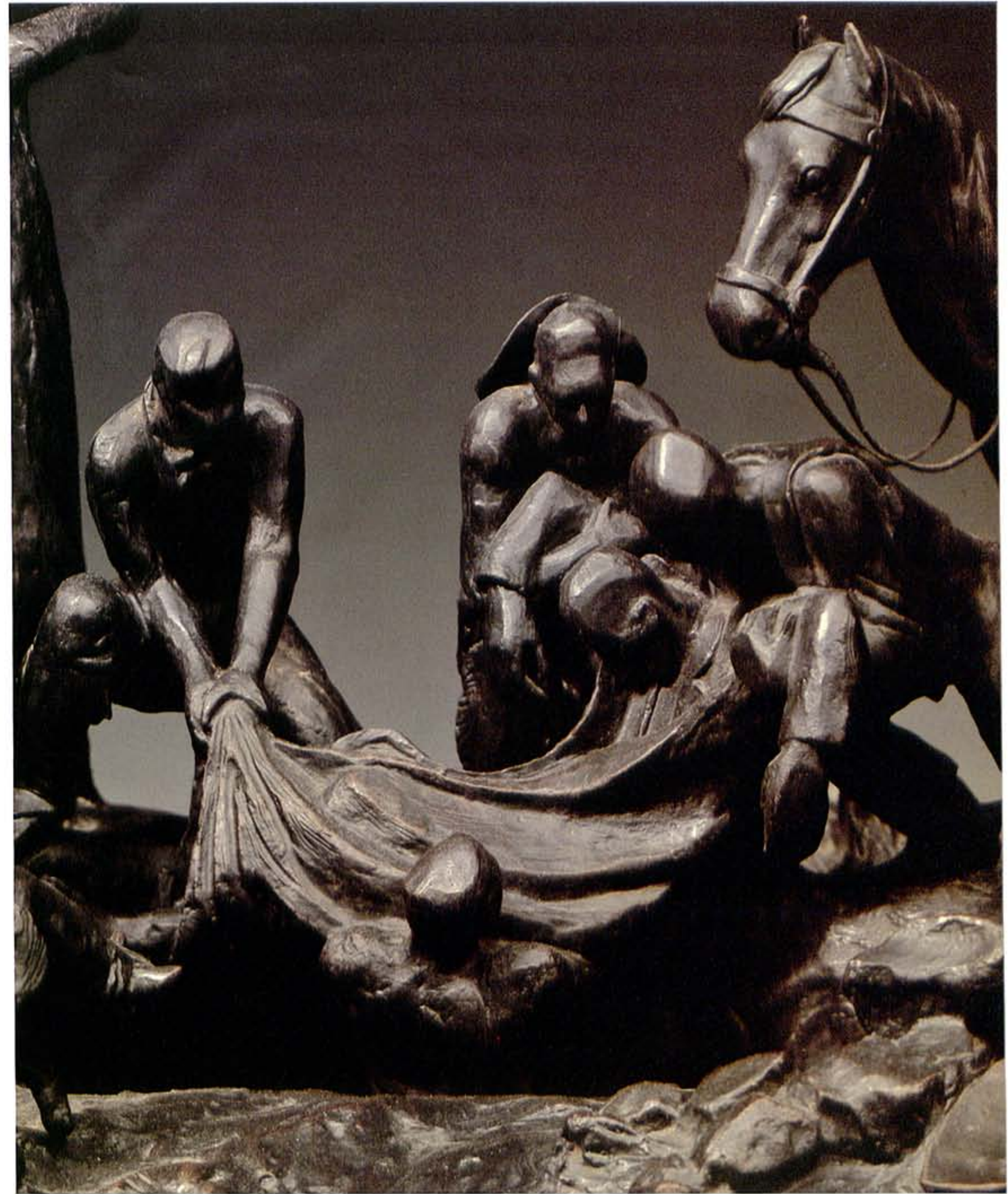




234. *Center Fire*. 1958. Patinaed bronze, 9 x 8¼ x 3¼"

235–37. *Plantin'*. 1959. Patinaed bronze, 11 x 26½ x 13"

*Plantin'* came about in late 1959. The *Range Burial* bronze had an operatic staginess. The setting is like a formal platform with actors arranged on its various sandstone levels. I wanted to simplify and make it much more spartan, emphasizing action turned to thought, the activity of inner reflection by the men around the grave. This came closer to the spirit that would emerge later in the painting.





THE WARRIORS





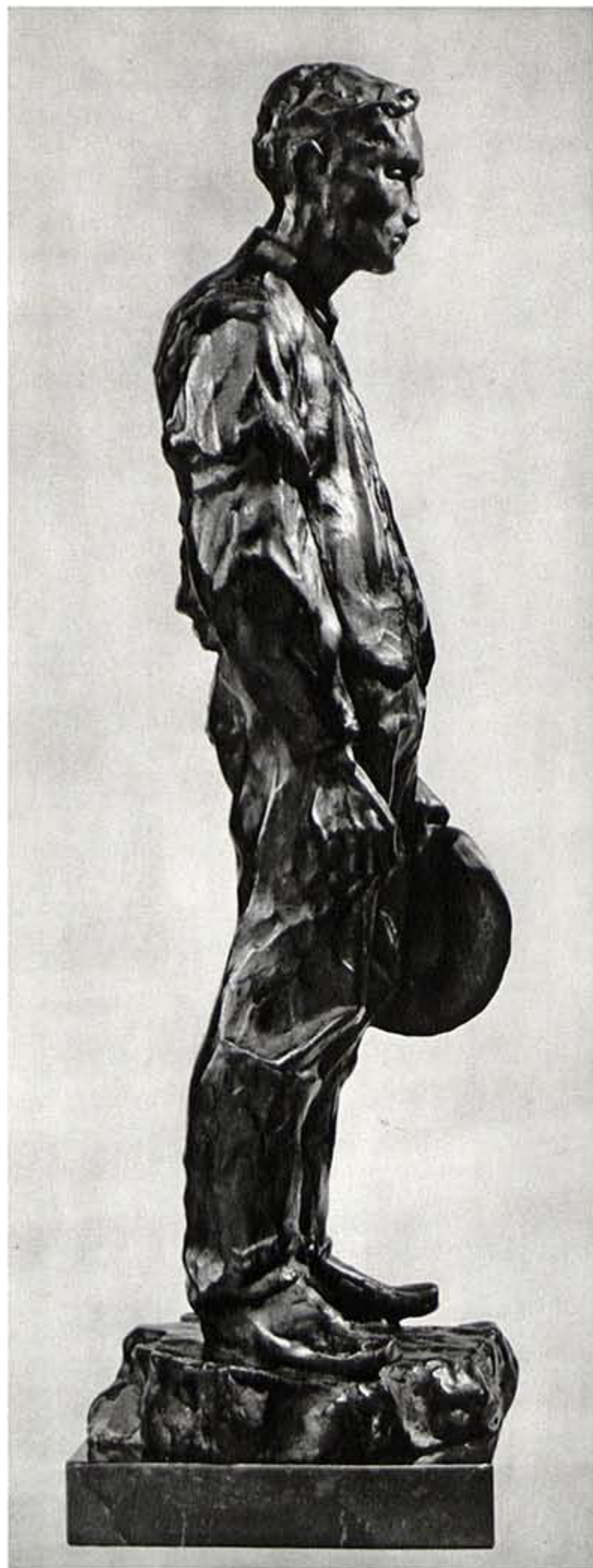


238. *Gunsil*. 1964. Painted bronze, 20 x 7 x 6"



239-40. *Gunsil*. 1962. Patinaed bronze, 20 x 7 x 6"





241-42. *Where the Trail Forks*. 1964. Patinaed bronze,  
19½ x 5¼ x 5½"

243. *Where the Trail Forks*. 1964. Painted bronze,  
19½ x 5¼ x 5½"

I have a warm, personal feeling for the *Gunsil* (pls. 238-40) because when I was punching cows before and even after the war, I was nothing but a gunsil kid, a pistol kid. Like the *Gunsil*, I didn't know if my ass was punched or bored. He left his hat on at the grave as a sign that he is a goddamned man—probably the only thing he's got, that and his braggart's pistol. The men in *Cowboy's Meditation* (pls. 245-46) and *Where the Trail Forks* (pls. 241-43) are "regulars," men who've lived and matured into manhood as cowboys. They're full of real pride and they can doff their hats in the presence of their dead companion without worrying about the impression they're making. I know them as my dearest friends, but I am not them. I see and identify with them as an artist, as a father, as the loser and winner of many battles, as maybe half a man and artist, but not as a cowboy. They are the true cowboy breed, with a pride and code and religion all their own.

The *Gunsil* was originally the young cowboy on the right of the painting (pl. 244) and the mounted man in the center was *Cowboy's Meditation*. They grew out of the painting, but then the painting changed. One feeling caused another to grow—all of the men are interwoven, almost different facets of the same man. There are no really apparent age differences. None of these men have given up. They are in the prime of life. They represent a kind of cross-section portrait of a certain physical and spiritual type of figure.

For the first time with these figures I had the irresistible urge to paint them, starting with the oldest of them, the man on horseback, the most complete of them (pl. 246). I wanted to get him in fine focus. I didn't want him to be the same color as his horse, or his vest the same color as his shirt, or his white forehead with the sun kept off by his hat the same color as his weathered face. I wanted to use everything I could in order to articulate and bear witness to this man. All of a sudden I had to state everything there, to construct the three dimensions and put in the shade and light, to create a fully realized form. I really cared about every bit. Every detail was like a universe in and of itself.

The local color on the outside, as specific as it is, has something to do by way of irony with the inner density and intensity of thought. All the apparency—the surface, the skin of the man and his clothing, his leather armor—somehow says that the real story is what is inside where his thought is, the thing that animates him and stops him in his tracks. It was what I needed to do just to be more fully myself at that point.





Henry Jackson © 1963

244. *Range Burial*. 1960–63. Oil on canvas, 10 x 21'. Whitney Gallery of Western Art, Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyo.



245. *Cowboy's Meditation*. 1964. Patinaed bronze, 22 x 20 x 9¼"



246. *Cowboy's Meditation*. 1964. Painted bronze, 22 x 20 x 9¼"



247. *Cowboy's Meditation, Bust*. 1968. Patinaed bronze, 5¼ x 4¼ x 2¼"

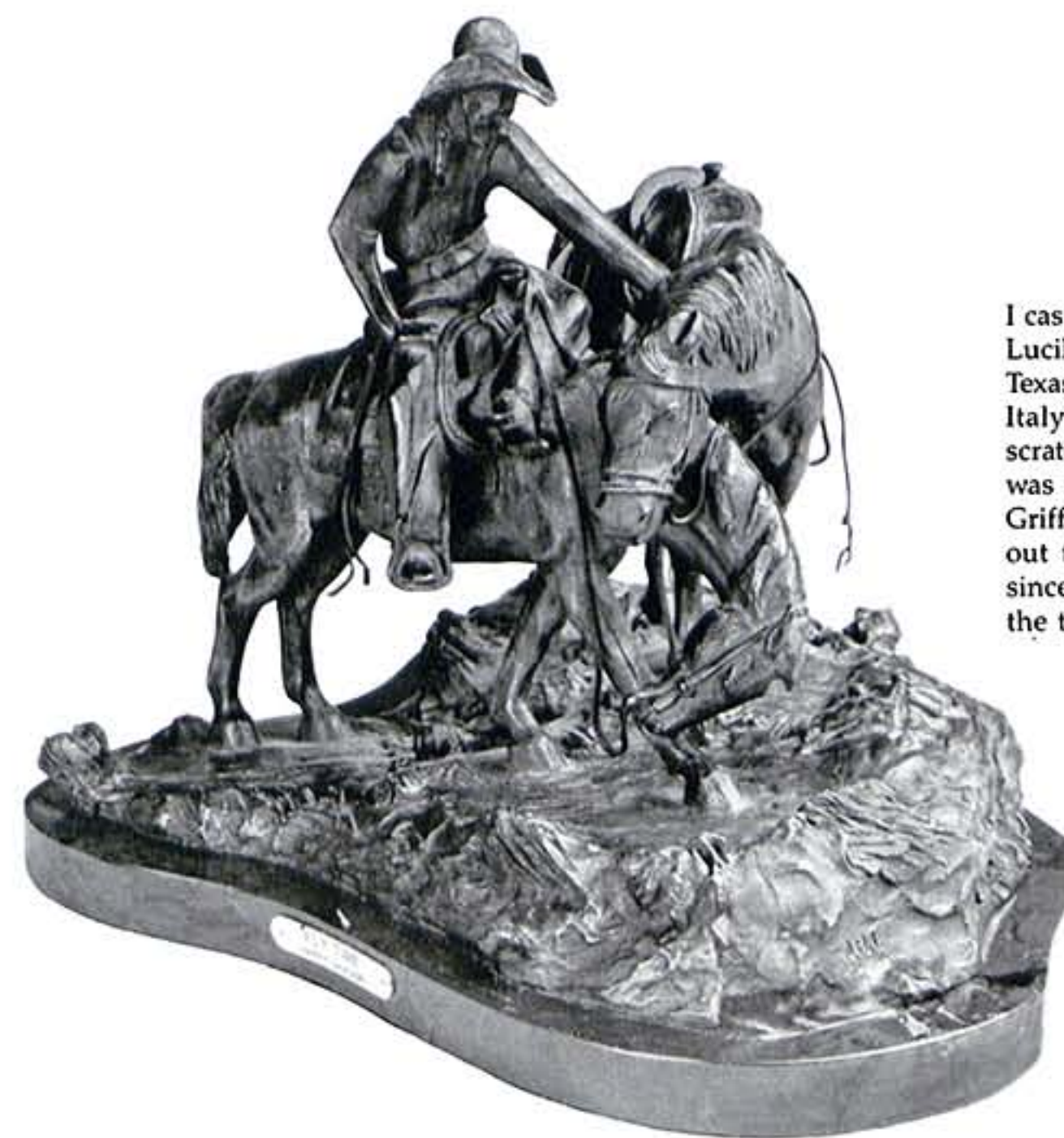
248. *Old Timer*. 1969. Patinaed bronze, 6 x 4¼ x 2¼"

249. *Old Timer*. 1969. Painted bronze, 6 x 4¼ x 2¼"



The *Cowboy's Meditation, Bust* derives directly from the larger horseback piece, and *Old Timer* is a further development of that, with details like the tally book in his right pocket, the tobacco sack in his left pocket, and the armbands adding to the facts of the man's chosen way of life. I love taking these men the world knows from a distance as men only of physical action, tough as boots, who ride morning, noon, and night through all kinds of weather, and show them close-in simply as men, keepers of cattle, each one proud as God himself of who he is.





I cast *Fly Time* directly from the *Range Burial* in 1959 for Lucille Brittingham and Suzette Byrnes, friends from Texas and Oklahoma. They were visiting my studio in Italy and wanted it for their sons. The horses are scratching flies attracted by the dead man. The cowboy was not wearing a hat in the burial scene (pl. 252). Jim Griffin of Boise, Idaho, bought one of these and pointed out the lack of a hat and I've put hats on them ever since. In 1968 or '69 I made the full base that appears in the third version (pl. 251).

250. *Fly Time*, second version. 1969. Patinaed bronze, 9¼ x 9½ x 8"

251. *Fly Time*, third version. 1969. Patinaed bronze, 9¼ x 9½ x 8"

252. *Fly Time*, first version. 1959. Patinaed bronze, 9¼ x 9½ x 8"





253. *Stampede*. 1959. Patinated bronze, 15 x 60 x 13½"



254-55. *Stampede*. 1969. Painted bronze, 15 x 60 x 13½"



