

CHAPTER 1

THE STUDIO



4. Jackson's studio in Camaiore, Italy. Jackson (on ladder next to clay model of *Sacagawea* monument), with (left to right) pantographer Lorenzo Daltorrione, foundry manager Franco Bertoni, Cody studio manager Gary Shoop, and groom Frumenzio Cima holding one of Jackson's saddle horses as a model. 1979

The small Italian town of Camaiore lies at the foot of the Carrara Alps, guarded by the thirteenth-century Fortezza di Rotaio high on a hill above. Snow-capped mountains rise to the east. The flat coastal plain, covered with greenhouses and flower-garden farms, stretches westward toward the Ligurian Sea. To the south and southeast are Pisa, Lucca, Pistoia, and Florence, cities that have historically dominated the area and used its resources—including marble from the famous quarries of Carrara, Pietrasanta, Massa, and Seravezza, and a tradition of bronze casting that has flourished since the ancient Etruscan past. It has always been a land of sculptors, and among them now is Harry Jackson, who has lived and worked here for more than twenty years.

Jackson's rambling establishment is just outside the center of Camaiore in a narrow valley formed by steeply rising hills. It originated as a single wall—built by Jackson in 1960 because he wanted to have something on the property he had just bought—grew to a one-room house and large studio, and was gradually expanded over the years to include additional living quarters, offices, and a library. The solidly built, rather modest rooms seem to spread out organically from the spacious twenty-foot-high studio. A detached set of buildings contains the workshops of the foundry, where Jackson's sculptures are molded, cast, and finished.

Inside the studio the cubicles under the huge windows are filled with wax models and bronzes of cowboys, frontiersmen, Indians, and other familiar figures of the American West. Works in progress stand on turntables that fill up most of the remaining space. On one end wall in large block letters are the words of the sculptor Auguste Rodin: "MAKING SCULPTURE IS LIKE LAYING BRICKS." A

section of movable plywood panels along the wall opposite the windows is covered with photographs of the Western movie hero John Wayne. On a stand below is Jackson's *The Marshal* (pls. 314–17), a richly painted bronze depicting the actor as Rooster Cogburn, the one-eyed reprobate frontier marshal in the movie *True Grit*. And in a corner, saddles and bridles are slung over a rack next to a cabinet filled with figurines and artifacts from Africa, the Far East, Europe, and America.

The place is full of seeming paradoxes, and yet the Western images and objects look as comfortable here as they do in Jackson's Cody, Wyoming, studio. His work is deeply rooted in the history, landscape, and people of the American West, and in his own experience as a cowboy among cowboys. But as an artist he has followed an independent path, drawing as much on contemporary abstract painting as on the humanist tradition of European art. His life and art converge in the same place, the same vision. "My works are drawn from a very recent historic epoch," he wrote in 1965, "accessible to me because both it and I are American. But I have seen in them the most universal and timeless form as common to all men. My desire is architectonic, not anecdotal; objective, not descriptive construction." The American West is for Jackson what the French Midi was for Paul Cézanne—the place in which he experiences the center of his own existence and therefore of existence itself. This vision is as vivid in his Italian studio, against the background of an antecedent culture, as it is in the land of its origin.

Jackson himself is a robust, barrel-chested man of moderate stature, with a graying Hemingway beard and intense blue eyes. Conversations with him are involved and continuous, filled with diversions, stories, explosions of wordplay and mimicry,

slang and expletives, ideas and connections that always seem to be discovered for the first time. His speech is deep and forceful, its Western intonation occasionally exaggerated to make a point or to revel in its own cadences. He generates an aura of energetic vitality that occasionally spills over into irascibility or impatience but is usually tempered by humor and at times even diffidence toward those with whom he is working or talking.

Jackson's dress reflects his cowboy background: "Cowboys are my chosen tribe. They gave me the grammar, the first yardstick for measuring life that I still use when I travel around the world." On his head is a sweat-stained Stetson, an American cowboy hat with a conspicuous hole in the right side of the crown, put there accidentally by the American painter Thomas Hart Benton during a visit to Camaio in 1965. Around the artist's neck is knotted a black sateen neckerchief. His blue work-shirt, soft leather vest with pockets crammed full, and faded, copper-riveted Levis are part of the working cowboy's attire. As are his boots, which he always wears—except in bed.

In the studio Jackson often works in marathon sessions, sometimes through the night. On this occasion, in December 1976, he has spread out a research report labeled "Sacagawea" on a broad



5. Working table in Jackson's Camaio studio with sculpture tools, warm water tank for keeping wax soft, Bunsen burner for heating tools, and jars of lubricating oil

table. Pen-and-ink drawings detail the probable dress of the native American heroine who, with her infant son strapped to her back, guided and aided Captains Lewis and Clark and the Corps of Discovery on their epic journey of exploration across the Rocky Mountains from what is now North Dakota to the Pacific Coast. The unfinished wax figure of an Indian woman he is working on now, begun only weeks earlier at his Lost Cabin, Wyoming studio, is the sculptor's first effort toward a monumental bronze of Sacagawea. His model, Marie Varilek, is of the same Shoshone tribe.

An assortment of knives and iron tools warms on a rack above the flame of a Bunsen burner. Wooden paddles and implements with various surfaces, shapes, and points lie within easy reach. Various oils in jars serve to lubricate hands and tools during the forming and working of the modeling wax.

In a white metal tank on the shelf beneath, the wax steeps in a warm water bath, tended by the experienced hand of Jackson's foundry manager Franco Bertoni, a master of *cera persa* (the lost-wax method of bronze casting), as were his father and grandfather before him. The wax itself is composed of bees and micro-crystalline waxes, a dash of non-drying oil, gum resin, paraffin, and black dye to enhance light reflection and clarity of form.

Jackson bends over an adjustable modeling stand, shaping the wax form rising from its surface. Beneath the shining mass is a welded metal framework, the armature, an abstract skeleton of the female figure. Its anatomical proportions, its form, stance, and carriage are imprinted on the sculptor's mind. The surfaces he shapes emerge from the volumes implicit in the now hidden skeletal structure.

Horn-rimmed bifocals perched on the tip of his nose, Jackson bobs and cocks his head to look from above and below catching the contours, constantly aware of the human form within the mass and within his own creative thought.

He stands back. Bertoni rotates the stand's table, turning the model. Jackson looks at mirrors placed around the work, studying the shape and density of the total form in the various reflections.

Returning to the modeling stand, he attacks his work with the consuming energy of an all-out assault. His face is expressionless, as if in a trance. It becomes flushed, as if in making love. His hands move quickly and surely. Dipping fingers into the olive oil. Popping soft wax in and out of his mouth. Kneading the warm wax. Rolling it on his pantsleg.



6. Jackson with original wax model of *Sacagawea* at studio in Lost Cabin, Wyo. 1976



7. Foundry manager Franco Bertoni and Jackson

Pressing it to the sculpture mass. Dabbing. Pushing and pulling. Clearing his throat in a staccato of rasping rumbles. Licking his fingers, applying saliva to the wax. "The emulsion of saliva helps. It acts as a kind of isolating material to the hand and is better than oil when you don't want the wax to be slippery."

Bertoni adds masses of wax to help block out the emerging form. The men converse in short phrases. Little need be said. Each knows the other's talent; each is familiar with his role in the creation. Jackson steps back. Bertoni rotates the revolving table. The sculptor scrutinizes the model, the mirrors. Reconnoiters the terrain. Returns to the attack. Cutting, slicing away here. Molding, building up there.

The figure stands tall, elegantly erect with one foot forward. There is a hint of the robed form of Rodin's *Balzac*. The blanket is drawn close, wrapping the baby's form on Sacagawea's back as though to shelter the child from the cold wind gusting across their path. Only the heads appear. The rest is the massive drapery-covered figure modeled to its own rhythm and to reveal the forms beneath.

Jackson moves to the worktable to study rows of photographs, portrait poses of Marie Varilek, and to carefully compare dimensions and elusive contours with those of the wax figure.

A door opens into the studio and the pregnant figure of a young woman, Jackson's wife Tina, appears.

"Hi, Harry. I brought you some honey and tea. How's it going?"

"Hello, Nini. How are you, darlin'." Jackson's voice is distinctive—gravelly, with a low, vibrant quality—but at the moment distracted sounding.

Valentina Lear Jackson and Harry have been married for almost three years, and this child, to be named Jesse Glen Lear Jackson, will be their first. She is the youngest daughter of inventor-industrialist Bill Lear, creator of the Lear Jet, the automobile radio, the auto-pilot, and the eight-track stereo. Her maternal grandfather was Ole Olsen of *Hellzapoppin'* fame, of Olsen and Johnson, the original "Sunshine Boys" of vaudeville. A pianist and composer herself, she is also deeply involved in Jackson's creative life.

After a few minutes Jackson returns to his work and Tina leaves; the tea grows cold, untouched.

The face of Sacagawea begins to emerge under the steady left hand of the sculptor. Measurements are checked, contours revised. The hair, parted in the middle, falls loosely; wisps blown forward by the wind frame the proud, resolute face.

Sunrise brings new life to the rain patterns undulating down the studio windows. Jackson lays down his tools, wipes his hands on pantslegs now slick from countless wipings. Sacagawea is set aside. There will be more such sessions before she is cast in bronze.

Jackson turns to the intercom and calls Tina. He wonders why no tea was delivered. Its arrival hours before has been forgotten—if it ever penetrated his awareness.

The two men leave the studio and pass through the library into the kitchen for a breakfast of Tuscan salami and bread. Jackson's cook and housekeeper of fifteen years, Angela Benedetti, had arrived at six to prepare for the morning traffic.

Jackson sits at a small table in the middle of the kitchen while people surge in one door and out the other creating a chaotic rise and fall of conversations in two languages. Among them are Jackson's two children by a former marriage, who are spending the winter with their father and attending school in Italy. Jackson swaps stories with ten-year-old Matt, the image of his father, and his daughter Molly, three years younger than Matt.

Eventually Tina sits in a chair opposite her husband and they discuss the business of the day: pre-cast subscription contracts for the Sacagawea bronzes; communications and instructions for the offices of Jackson's Wyoming Foundry Studios in Camaio, New York, and Wyoming. One day, un-



8. Jackson sketches from the 21-inch first working model of *Sacagawea*. 1977

common but not untypical, comes to an end, or rather merges with the next.

After three hours of sleep Jackson awakes to supervise the scheduled pouring in the foundry building across the courtyard. It is a ritual that must not be missed, and everyone attends. Above the foundry Jackson's two horses—the buckskin quarter horse Victory Deck and the brown mare Gina—frolic on the steep, terraced hillside.

Among the molds to be poured this morning is

Two Champs (pls. 330–34), a work of 1974 depicting the great turn-of-the-century rodeo champion Clayton Danks riding Steamboat, America's first nationally famous bucking horse. A special casting of this bronze was presented by President Gerald Ford to Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip of England on the occasion of their visit in commemoration of America's Bicentennial in 1976. Another casting was given by Bill Lear to King Khaled of Saudi Arabia in the same year.

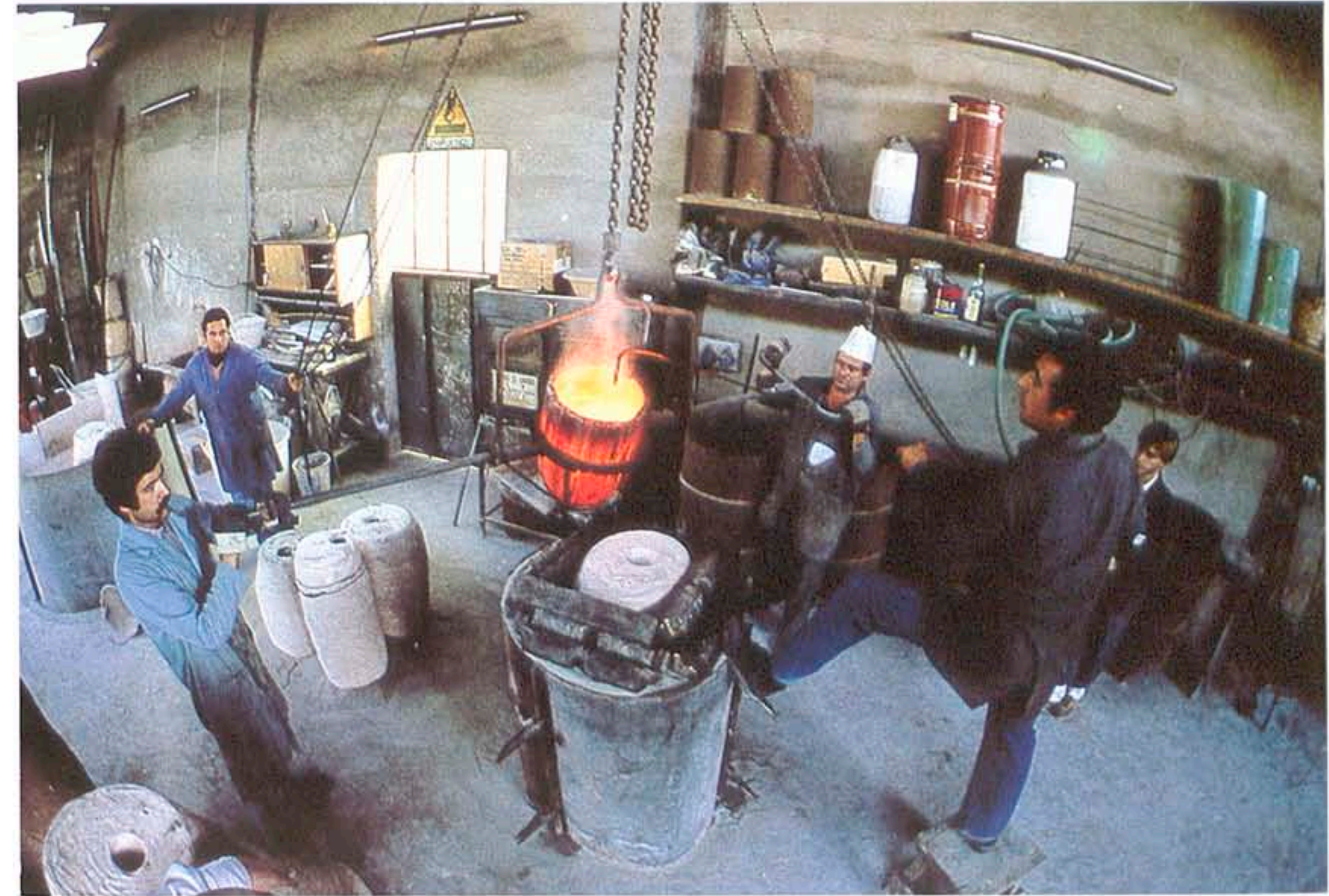
The lost-wax process, which goes back at least to



9. Bertoni and Jackson in front of the north skylight of the artist's studio in Camaiore. 1980



10. Exterior of Jackson's workshops and foundry at Camaiore. 1980



11. Bronze pouring at Jackson's foundry, with Bertoni (standing, right) directing Alfredo Seardo, Giovanni Ferri, Mario Giannechini, and Massimo Giovannetti (left to right). 1979

ancient Greece, is described in detail by Jackson in his *Lost Wax Bronze Casting*, published in 1972, the only comprehensive book ever written on the subject. From a wax model to the finished bronze sculpture is a long, arduous procedure. At the pouring stage the hollow fire-clay mold—from which the original wax has been melted out, or “lost”—is ready to receive the molten bronze. The operation is orchestrated by Franco Bertoni with a staff of artisans, all trained by Jackson and Bertoni.

Mario Giannechini watches the crucible, waiting for the proper color, the proper temperature. His eye is trained in a skill that has been passed from one generation to another. He will not allow a modern high-temperature thermometer to be

used. “If you bring it into my pouring room, I will break it, step on it. It will ruin my eye for the color of the flame, the quality of the heat.” His art is sacred; thermometers are sacrilege.

Mario pronounces the molten bronze ready. Franco ladles slag and impurities from the crucible's surface. Mario and an assistant grip opposite handles of a huge pair of tongs and lift the glowing red crucible to the cradle-basket of a two-handled pourer. A third man operates a chain hoist of the overhead crane, lifting the crucible and its pouring cradle into the air as the two men guide it with its long handles.

The crane is maneuvered over the molds, guiding the crucible into position above the first mold

to be poured. Franco signals and Mario tips the crucible by rotating its handlebars. His aim is unerring. White-hot molten bronze pours into the funnel. Franco signals that the mold is filled; the crucible is turned upright. Each of the other molds is then filled in the same precise manner.

After twenty-four hours the fire-clay mold can be opened and chipped away from the hardened bronze. Then follows the time-consuming process of finishing the work—removing the core material, cutting away the gates and tie rods, filling holes and eliminating imperfections. Cleaning and chasing give the work its final sharpness of detail and surface texture. The finished piece is then either given a patina, applied by hand with acids and fire, or a polychrome finish, handpainted in homemade *tempera grassa*.

The process of bronze casting is only one cycle in Jackson's work, one that might even be left out. The art would still exist in the form of wax, or clay, or sketch, or idea. But somehow it is essential, not only in terms of making a complete statement and disseminating it, but also as a ritual, a symbol of the total process of art that reaches back through

centuries of artists and artisans who have done the same throughout history. In a similar way, Jackson's art is both completely contemporary—engaged in the moment—and connected with the past, or some other dimension of time or space. One does not exist without the other, and the work of art, therefore, is potentially and literally far more than the sum of its parts; it can encompass not simply apparent form, but eons of time in a single lifetime, or a single dancing figure.

In an essay called "Circles," which Jackson first read as a young Marine in the Second World War, Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote: "The life of man is a self-evolving circle which, from a ring imperceptibly small, rushes on all sides outwards to new and larger circles, and that without end." Jackson's art is about the connectedness of all things on this circle—the earth, the universe—starting at the center, which gradually opens up as the perimeter expands, as life and art evolve. Slowly, and mostly against the current of fashion and the criticism of peers and critics alike, he has insisted himself into the center, the eye of the storm, by listening "to myself as clearly as I can, for it is only there that I can finally embrace my own truth."



12-14. Jackson and his quarter horse Victory Deck at Camaiole. 1980

