



## CHAPTER 6

# PAINTING INVITES SCULPTURE

What was perceived as Jackson's change of direction drew attention from several quarters. *LIFE* magazine devoted a nine-page spread to the artist, titled "Painter Striving to Find Himself," in its issue of July 9, 1956, with a report and commentary by Dorothy Seiberling on Jackson's career and his break with abstract painting, featuring a discussion of *The Italian Bar*. He was described as a man of lonely decision, a conceivable folk hero turning to "the hard way," disinclined to run with the herd. Seiberling cited his involvement in Abstract Expressionism, which "opened up a whole new world of imagery and formal beauty," but also recognized that "the principles of abstraction which he once thought an end in themselves were incorporated in all great works of art—not as an end, however, but as a means to a more encompassing human experience."

"The hard way" meant something else to the New York critics. To them it was the very thing Jackson had presumably turned away from—an interpretive faithfulness which they felt he had abandoned for an easy and safe realism. Their more narrow and, in a sense, provincial concern was with the consistency of an artist's language, which since Impressionism had been, in their eyes at least, an increasingly introspective investigation of itself. Jackson, however, was not the only artist of that period to renegotiate with the language of figuration. Pollock reintroduced recognizable images in 1951, wrenching blotted heads into place as though to defy the strangle of his line. De Kooning

never strayed far from his trenchant series on women. Even Franz Kline used models for a while before his death in 1962. But these artists still gave abstraction the upper hand: references to visual reality had to fight for every inch of ground and to remain hidden and ambiguous. Pollock's cry, "Harry, you can't do that" had meant at least partly that he himself could not do it. The integrity of his or anyone's stylistic handwriting was the first, and sometimes only, line of defense. It seemed to mean survival—for critics no less than artists. This essentially extra-artistic issue confused many, including Clement Greenberg, who had championed Jackson's abstract work and then, in 1960, wrote in a strangely reasoned letter to *The New York Times* responding to a review of Jackson's first Western bronzes: "I find the best art of our time to be preponderantly abstract, but I could wish it were not. All other things being equal (which never happens), I too prefer illusionist art."

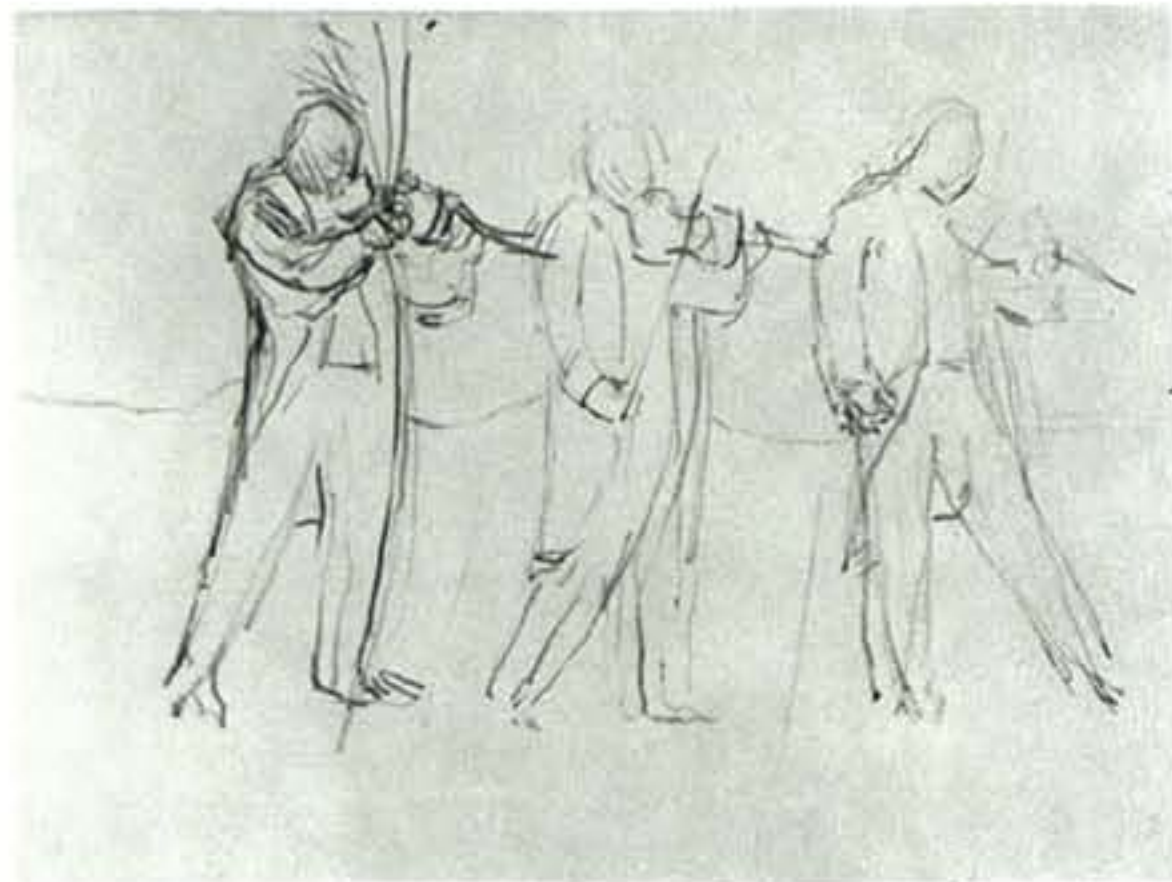
Jackson, however disappointed he might have been in the reaction of the New York art community, was not confused; he was simply following his own vision. Abstraction had come to him, partly through Pollock, as an exciting, freeing discipline, a means of orchestrating color, line, and form in a single-minded, direct, and unified way, and it was climaxed for him technically in the Mexican collages of 1949 and in the *Triptych* of 1950. It also released in his work spouts of color, as evidenced in the energetic flair of *Red, Green and Several Others* (pl. 58), as well as *The Condor* (pl. 55), from the 1952

86. Harry Jackson at the Vignali-Tommasi Foundry in Pietrasanta, with master founder and proprietor Aldo Vignali (right) and assistant. 1959





87-89. Studies for *Italian Bag Piper*. 1957. Collection of the artist



90-91. Studies of David Oistrakh. 1959. Collection of the artist



one-man show at Tibor de Nagy. Abstract Expressionism was enough to invigorate his vision for a while, but not enough to contain it forever.

As his line found ways of referring to natural form within the abstraction, it did so with no evidence of resisting or even grudging, but with an actual easing of the language. Signature, the mark of personality, was not something to fight over. Jackson's battle now was to come to his own formidable terms of responsibility, both to the history of figurative achievement he found in Europe and to the history of his own elemental experience. It was a search to get the shape right, to get the medium right, to get the subject right, to bring the apparent contradictions of his vision into focus. The intensity shows not only in the turbulence of his journal pages and in his marital troubles (he and Joan separated in 1956 and divorced in 1962), but in the way he attacked. His long-time friend and patron, Dr. Adrian Zorogniotti, tells of sitting for a portrait (pl. 110). Each session began with interminable diddling, temporizing, spitting on the floor. And then, without warning, came the instant of action—total, fierce, uncompromising—the attack on the work. He was dreaming, as he wrote at the end of 1956, "of a technique that shall grow from my very being, my guts; but above all such a thing can't be forced or faked... I must bide my time with the studies that offer the greatest wealth and fall naturally into my way of thinking."

The question of "technique" in Jackson's work is complicated, first on an aesthetic level because it involves an integration of two seemingly contradictory modes, one flat and "abstract," the other illusionistic and "realistic." In a conventional sense *The Italian Bar* is a combination of many techniques, everything Jackson had absorbed about modeling, perspective, the depiction of movement and atmosphere, the organization of forms in space and shapes on the surface. But the painting is not conventional, either in traditional or contemporary terms. It is a fusion of hundreds of studies made before, during, and after his first stay in Europe, and its technique is synonymous with this process, since every sketch implies an eventual assimilation into "my natural way of thinking."

More important, Jackson's way of thinking, his technique, derives from and culminates in a human dimension beyond aesthetic order, or ideally, equivalent to it, of which social and existential realities are at the core. *The Italian Bar* is not simply a casual genre scene, a picturesque slice of American urban life. It is, rather, the apprehension of a way of life in which every aspect of appearance has



92. *Italian Bag Piper*. 1957. Oil on canvas, 36 x 72". Collection of the artist





93. *Italian Street Musicians*. 1957. Oil on canvas, 35 x 28". Collection of the artist

been turned inside out to reveal the inner life of the social group. It represents the intersection of social and historical forces with individual existence. This might be said of any group painting in the history of Western art, from Giotto's frescoes in the Arena Chapel to Renoir's *Luncheon of the Boating Party* or Matisse's *Joy of Life*. The difference is not only in time and place (the uniqueness of the Italian-American community in New York), but in the way Jackson perceives and realizes the intersecting structure as a dense, endless web focused everywhere in the painting. Whereas most art in the Western tradition generalizes from the particular expanding outward, Jackson particularizes from the general expanding inward. In Giotto's *Pietà*, Velázquez' *Surrender at Breda*, Courbet's *Burial at Ornans*, Renoir's *Boating Party*, and Matisse's *Joy of Life* the figures are all ultimately absorbed into some drama, space, ambience, or harmony greater than themselves. Jackson's figures on the contrary absorb the general mood or milieu so that each separate figure is an intersection of the overall field. An early primitive example of this is the wartime painting *Crossfire* of 1945 (pl. 48), in which the abstract

structure is defined by lines of fire that intersect in the agonized forms of dying soldiers. The figures are literally the focal points of the painting's structure, the vectors of life and death. In *The Italian Bar* the merging of art and life is more fully developed. The figure is part of the whole flow of relationships laterally and in and out of space—the web of existence that defines the group—but is also a singular presence endowed with the spirit and characteristics, the "code" (taken as a social or even biological, hereditary order) of the group as a whole. Interaction culminates in the foreground group of men, particularly in the central seated figure, in whom all the rhythms of the painting seem to converge. He is the apex of the dense social fabric, the figure who commands both the overall space and our attention, and the most fully realized presence, down to details of dress and expression. Everything inside and outside the painting is mediated by him. The reason for Jackson's obsession with getting the details right, whether the uniforms of the British Indian Army, the rigging of a saddle, the slouch of a fatigued soldier, or the rumpled collar of an Italian-American padrone, becomes clear. He understood, instinctively at first, and then with increasing consciousness, that every detail contains the whole and is absolutely true to the culture of which it is a part, just as the individual figure contains the whole not only of his own experience but of his group and ultimately of his species. Rendering this order of things, comprehending the nature and spirit of a thing in a single drawn line, constitutes Jackson's "technique."

*The Italian Bar* is a seminal work because it achieves a new level of complexity and unity that begins to resolve the ostensible conflict between abstraction and realism. The painting accommodates on a large scale the conjunction of life and art that had concerned Jackson since the beginning, and particularly since the war, when, as a Marine and an artist, he felt himself the focus of thousands of lives and deaths. But now the structure Jackson had so carefully built in *The Italian Bar* was to be dismantled and reconstructed in a different form. The next step was literally into another dimension—that of sculpture—which seemed finally to free him to undertake the Western themes that were so ingrained in his life. His art now had the scope and depth appropriate to his vision, although it was not until two years after completing *The Italian Bar* that its full implications were realized and the change occurred.

In January 1957 Jackson traveled to Europe for



94. *Spaccanapoli*. 1957. Oil on canvas, 52½ x 37". Private collection





95. Copy after Raphael's *La Donna Velata* in the Pitti Palace, Florence. 1957. Oil and tempera on canvas, 24 x 30". Collection of the artist

the second time, supported by funds from a Fulbright travel grant and an Italian government study grant (Clement Greenberg's carefully worded recommendation placed "great faith" in his "maturing" and in a "character strong enough to bridle and direct talents that are, if anything, a little too brilliant"). He settled in Florence, outside the Porta San Miniato, on a small working farm just ten minutes walk from the Pitti Palace. Later in the year he moved to a studio in the garden of a private girls school. He painted portraits of friends and acquaintances, the solidly realistic *Italian Bag Piper* (pl. 92), and a strange, powerfully expressionistic painting of Italian street musicians that has an almost surrealistic quality (pl. 93). For most of 1957, however, his time was spent in museums, sketching and copying (notably Raphael's *La Donna Velata* in the Pitti Palace, pl. 95), studying, and taking notes, mostly in Florence but also in Venice, Paris, London, and elsewhere. His friend Emmanuel Ghent, the composer and psychoanalyst, remembers standing for hours with him in front of a single Titian. "I look at the past masterpieces differently than other artists," Jackson noted in a

later journal. "I look to what the artists have wished and dreamed of accomplishing as much or even more than I look at what they have actually done."

It was on one such museum visit in December 1957, to the Louvre, that Jackson recognized the possibility of accomplishing his own wishes and dreams. He was accompanied by Robert Coe, who was then the United States Ambassador to Denmark and a trustee of the Whitney Gallery of Western Art in Cody. They had met years earlier in Wyoming, and Jackson had since painted portraits of several members of the Coe family. Looking at Gustave Courbet's *Burial at Ornans* (pl. 96), both men saw parallels with their own experience of the American West. Courbet's simple country burial in the Franche-Comté suggested a burial on the open range. The faces might have been those of frontiersmen, pioneers, or cowboys, and the rock escarpments and alluvial plain of the landscape recalled the terrain of the Shoshone and Greybull rivers. Courbet's monumental, undifferentiated space and line of mourning figures revived in Jackson his 1954 shipboard dream of "images of cowboys standing singly...to the most wonderful violent tumult of men and horses and cowboys." *Burial at Ornans* suggested a more expansive vision than the tightly woven fabric of *The Italian Bar* would allow, and a more elemental integration of nature, society, and the individual. Vast outdoor space replaced confined interior space. The amorphous, boundless space of Abstract Expressionism could be reclaimed in such a way that the human form was the mediator of its infinite energy.

Jackson's conversation with Robert Coe at the Louvre led to his proposal for two monumental paintings. Coe enthusiastically agreed to back them, with the idea that both would hang at the Whitney Gallery in Cody, which was undergoing extensive expansion at the time. One would depict a "cowboy burial on the open range," as it was provisionally called, the other the cattle stampede in which the cowboy was killed.

Returning to his studio in Florence, Jackson began work on the commission immediately with compositional sketches for both canvases. "Ever since talking to you last Sunday," he wrote to Coe, "my mind has been aflame with vivid images for the two compositions. I picture something very large and open in spirit [referring to the burial] but quiet, filled with silence and as apparently simple and truly heroic as those riders and that land and their primitive story are. I think in terms of the



96. Gustave Courbet. *Burial at Ornans*. 1850. Oil on canvas, 9' 5 1/2" x 21' 9 3/4". The Louvre, Paris

heroes and warriors in Genesis or Homer. To me there has always been something out of time in the image of a wild leather-covered horseman exactly a brother to Rembrandt's *Polish Rider* [pl. 98] in the Frick Museum in New York. In our own time there is no other figure besides our own American cowboy who so well serves as a medium for this kind of timeless spirit..."

The large and open spirit was an essential part of Jackson's overall conception, but he soon began to concentrate on the figures themselves, as he had for *The Italian Bar*. His need to move around the figure, to understand it from every angle, to make it real and three-dimensional suggested the possibility of actually modeling figures as an aid to composition. The practice was an old one and Jackson had been reminded of it on a trip to London a few months earlier, when he encountered clay models in the Victoria and Albert Museum made by Andrea Sansovino for Perugino's painting *The Descent from the Cross*. Tintoretto had worked in a similar manner in the sixteenth century, as had Poussin in the seventeenth, and Jackson may have recalled Grant Wood's use of models for his painting *Spring Turning*, which he had seen as long ago as 1937 in the pages of *LIFE* magazine. There were also the meticulously detailed toy soldiers of his childhood and the models he used as a scene painter to plot lighting for opera and theater.



97. Studies after Courbet's *Burial at Ornans*. Apr. 29, 1963. Ink and wash on paper, 8 1/4 x 10 1/4". Collection of the artist





98. Rembrandt van Rijn. *The Polish Rider*. Oil on canvas, 45½ x 52½". The Frick Collection, New York

Almost from the beginning the figures Jackson made were more than just models, and by the time he signed a contract with Coe in March 1958, it included not only the two paintings for \$10,000 each, but also a bronze sculpture of each subject for \$3,125 each. In fact, over the next four years, Jackson's time was almost entirely devoted to sculptures, several related to and some altogether separate from the burial and stampede themes. Although he returned sporadically to the two paintings, he did not complete *Range Burial* (pls. 120, 244) until December 1963 and *Stampede* (pls. 128, 256) until July 1966. Neither could have been realized without the intervention of sculpture.

Jackson's venture into the new medium began at the Vignali-Tommasi Foundry in Pietrasanta, 65 miles northwest of Florence. The town had been a center of marble carving and lost-wax bronze casting for centuries. He was given a space to work, sculptor's tools and modeling wax by Aldo Vignali, the master bronze founder and proprietor. At first he worked haphazardly, lumping together a crude but powerful version of the burial sculpture. Knowing nothing about armatures, he modeled the wax instead over a rough plaster base (pl. 103). The work was eventually destroyed. Next he undertook two pieces that had nothing to do with the Coe commission, although they are ultimately related to it. *Trail Boss* (pls. 99, 201–202) was made in one night "with my elbows. Didn't know how to do it." This was also done without an armature.

*Ground Roper* (pls. 203–205) displays the same blockiness and rough surfaces.

By branching out almost immediately from the task at hand, Jackson was doing something quite typical of his artistic ambition. The departure into sculpture was more than a technical means to an end. It was a primitive act which produced a real object of mass and weight where there had been only an idea. The job he had taken on with the Coe commission was overwhelming, almost impossible. The theme and the scale he proposed were nearly beyond comprehension (which made it a fit subject for art). His visualization of the burial scene, as "apparently simple" as he wanted to make it, could not simply be transferred to canvas, any more than could his total impressions of war. There were too many layers of death within life within space within time. The added dimension of sculpture made the manifold levels of the work more available, pushing them closer to reality. The movements, expressions, and relationships of the figures could be experienced as actual through touch as well as sight. While painting remained the idealized—and at times he thought overintellectualized—plane of his visualization, sculpture



99. *Trail Boss*. 1958. Patinaed bronze, 8¼ x 8 x 3¼"



100. Study after etching by Goya. 1961. Ink and wash on paper, 7¼ x 10¼". Collection of the artist



101. Study after sculpture by Degas. 1959. Pencil on paper. Collection of the artist

engaged more of the total being of the subject, the artist, and the viewer. A year earlier he had noted, in reference to Cézanne, that "a deep experience cannot be fully expressed without the full form." Painting, however, always retains something of the conceptual, the thought rather than the lived, so that full form is always to some degree unattainable. In sculpture it is of the essence. It was this quality that he wanted to transfer back into his painting through sculpture, but the new medium took on its own life in his work.

So much so that his second departure was away from the subject of the commission itself. The burial and stampede represented the broad scheme of things, the opposite poles of violent energy and absolute stillness, simultaneous in their universality and timelessness. The early drawings and the first rough model of the burial established the general outline. The work had come into being as a vaguely defined mass, an expression of its general spirit. But there could be no deep experience without full form, without something beyond the nascent formlessness of the studies. For Mondrian this would have meant diagramming an underlying ab-

stract structure on the surface. For Jackson the abstract structure was a given; it needed to be brought to life. Full development of the burial and stampede themes depended on the full development of the individual figures within them. These figures were not simply actors in a drama, but separate entities, each with his own character and life history. Jackson therefore turned his attention for the moment to two figures of working cowboys (*Trail Boss* and *Ground Roper*) that had nothing to do with either the burial or stampede. His quest for a "deeper humanity" focused on the self-sufficient image of the "cowboy standing singly."

In the first few months of 1958, Jackson was pushing in several directions at once, working on the overall concepts of the Coe commission paintings and bronzes, making new figures to bring those concepts to life, and rapidly absorbing the techniques of wax modeling and bronze casting. The commission opened up a realm of tremendous possibilities which engaged him totally. But the creative energy it released was accompanied by a strain of desperation. In early May 1958 disaster struck. Jackson, accompanied by another Fulbright



scholar and an American sailor, had a night on the town in Florence. It was just before the Italian elections and one of those rare occasions when anti-American sentiment was in evidence. In a tavern across the street from the Florence railroad terminal, a particularly boisterous group of youths began heckling the three Americans. Being outnumbered, Jackson and his friends took their leave. When a dozen of the youths in black leather jackets accosted them outside the bar, Jackson's scholarly friend began to shake his finger under the nose of the largest of the group and the free-for-all was on. His two friends fled, but Harry battled on until he was knocked senseless to the pavement.

He came out of a coma three days later in the Santa Maria Nuova Hospital. That he had brought two of the assailants to the hospital with him did not ease the pain of his broken ribs and fractured skull. The latter injury would leave his nerves impaired through six months of renewed grand mal seizures and debilitating side effects, a period of agony equalled only by the months of seizures that followed his bromide poisoning in Mexico in 1949. In June he settled at Pietrasanta to recuperate and be near his work in the Vignali-Tommasi foundry, and gradually he was able to lift himself above the physical and emotional morass. He began to work an hour a day. On July 4 he was able to write in his journal: "This morning I begin the burial study in wax."

On July 7 he wrote in exultation: "The good simple day's work has made me feel better than anything else I can conjure up right now. When working like that there is no time for thinking and the work itself must become the thought. That is the only sane, right way for me to ever think. It must be embodied in my work, in the dream of my whole being. At my best, seeing, thinking and creating are all one and the same act."

The next day a major technical obstacle was overcome: "Worked until 7, with much trouble with the wax. We now have decided upon another combination using pure beeswax with its usual addition of paraffin and a little motor oil and instead of rosin for hardness we shall use carnauba... the wax has proven a boon. It works perfectly."

Despite "the poor functioning of most all of my surface faculties for the last many weeks," Jackson was working and discovering steadily. "To learn to emulsify thinking with execution and produce what appears to be a single unified action is one of the most basic secrets of any true work." Referring to the burial sculpture in August, he was "still

working steadily. I am being as painstaking as possible and yet trying to create the whole mass and give it a single, dominating mood without consciously thinking about it all the time." On August 14, "the right-hand group clicked into place just like that."

Then, bogged down in September, he wrote: "To humble myself before the landscape to the point of allowing it to dominate me and rob me of my own vision is as false as its opposite, that of ignoring completely the outer objective world. The only true way is between these two, wherein I am inspired through nature to surrender my own temperament and allow the inspiring object and the inspired, living, forming temperament to unite in the form of the work."

By the next day he was again forging ahead. "All it takes is for a little work to go well. Had the idea to have the tree dead from lightning which had struck it straight down the middle leaving it stark, split and dead. It must be obvious that it once was a tall, strong straight one when it was alive. On reflection, in the form of afterthoughts, I saw how incredibly 'corny' and strictly 19th century 'meller drammy' this note is, yet because it came to me as a clear and unthought vision, I went ahead and said to hell with the criticism, let it be 'corny.' I think it is just exactly the thing and the entire piece has profited greatly both in form and meaning."

The burial wax was practically finished by October, although the final casting would not take place for several months. The last ten months had been a period of tremendous productivity, and it is revealing that during much of it he was inspired by the prodigious example of Honoré Balzac, a near contemporary of Courbet whose novels Jackson read constantly. His journals quote Balzac on genius, vision, youth, maturity, corruption, discipline. More than anything it was Balzac's sheer passion for work that impressed the sculptor and it shows in his own determination and the vitality and variety of his work. While completing the burial wax, Jackson also started a number of independent figures, including *Bronc Stomper* (pls. 206–209), a work that combines violence and grace in a twisting, spiraling confrontation of man and horse. Two other figures describe the different spirits of the burial and stampede. In *Center Fire* (pl. 234) the young cowboy gazes downward in deep thought while his horse stands, only slightly expectant, with his four hoofs firmly on the ground. In *Hazin' in the Leaders* (pl. 259) the entire composition of cowboy and horse is balanced on one foreleg of the



102. *Range Burial*. 1959. Patinaed bronze, 15 x 43 x 23"



103. First study for *Range Burial* in wax over plaster and wood, approx. 12 x 18". Now destroyed. Mar. 1958



horse so that the furious action of the work is expressed in one line or one point. Both works are more finely finished than any of Jackson's earlier sculpture and more detailed in dress and gear. Both come from a larger work, but neither would fit back into it. Each has attained its own integrity. It is as though in focusing on a single figure the rest of the scene had dropped away and we now become aware of a closer reality moving in on us. And yet the entire arena of action and meaning is still implicit in every detail.

These single figures embody complexes of forces that are resolved at the very centers of the figures themselves. In the *Range Burial* bronze (pls. 102, 231–33) the resolution takes place in the lifeless body of the young cowboy, which exercises a terrible, relentless pull on the surrounding figures. Every gesture, movement, and gaze is directed toward the shroud being lowered into the ground. The landscape curves and swells like a maelstrom around the central void of the grave. This is not the still, open scene Jackson had visualized for the painting but an intense grappling with death, which ironically draws its energy from the vitality of the individual figures and their relatedness in the intricate interwoven rhythm of the group. It is a vision of animistic power, in its purest physical expression.

In October Jackson took a respite from the foundry to spend two months in New York and Wyoming. At the beginning of January 1959 he was back in Pietrasanta, and on January 18 he resumed work on his sculpture, blocking out the masses for *Stampede*. A few days later he took advantage of an offer by Aldo Vignali and moved into a small room above the foundry, where he could be "as near and as completely immersed in the work as possible." There he began work on subjects involving music, and combining cowboys and dancers, which would be taken up seriously later.

In twelve days at the beginning of February he completed a standing figure of a cowboy, later called *Salty Dog* (pls. 210–12). The figure has a special significance in Jackson's work. Later he described it as "all that I want to say in the single figure of a man standing there. I want to say it in his repose." It is the first work in which the figure is not engaged in some action. The man is simply what he is, an old Texas cowboy who has seen about all there is to see. He engages everything around him without reference to anything in particular. Life is accumulated in the incredible pattern of wrinkles in his clothing, the gaunt structure of his face, and the balance of his stance. Jackson felt

for the first time he had gotten inside the form of the man beneath the clothing, at rest but poised with one foot forward, torso slightly turned and hands on hips, holding his holster and coiled rope ("put his life on that line"), ready for anything. He is an affirmation of life, a challenge to the terrifying vortex of the burial and headlong rush of the stampede, because he has known both situations and risked death himself. "He can laugh when you break your neck, because he knows he can laugh when he breaks his own. He can afford to laugh—but nobody else better."

From the completion of the *Salty Dog* wax on February 12, Jackson spent most of the next month casting, finishing, and applying patinas to the bronzes he had done to that point, preparing them for the opening of the Whitney Gallery in Cody on April 25. On February 26 he noted that "two bronzes [*Range Burial* and *Bronc Stomper*] are next to completely finished. This evening Aldo and I put on the patina with acid and fire and they both at once became veritable small masterpieces and I cannot look and feel this enough. Absolutely nothing has been done of this caliber on the cowboy since Remington and Russell and I am overjoyed. I can't wait to have the right people see these. Wait 'til I show them to Bob [Coe]. How I would like to fly home and personally show them."

The month and a half before he actually did fly home was devoted primarily to technical matters and to reflection after the year-long surge of creativity. During the year Jackson had been sustained by the literature of Europe—by Balzac, Thomas à Kempis, Rilke, and Cervantes—and by the examples of Courbet, as well as Renaissance and Baroque art. Now there was a subtle turn toward the culture of the American West as an articulate force equal with that of European culture. The first clear expression of this is *Salty Dog*, in which the salient qualities of the cowboy are condensed. These qualities are present in the earlier sculptures but they are to an extent subservient to European iconographic traditions, for instance those of the equestrian in *Trail Boss*, or the Deposition of Christ in *Range Burial*. *Salty Dog* establishes a new idiom in which the stance and attitude are unmistakably American.

The new awareness also surfaces sporadically in Jackson's journal of the period, and later with greater frequency. On March 2, trying to decide on a title for *Range Burial*, he cites two lines from a cowboy ballad which stress the simple dignity and shared humanity of the cowboy's death: "Bill you take my saddle, and Slim you take my gun/and

Shorty take my lariat rope, when my last ride is done./We wrapped him in his blanket, and buried him in the ground/and covered him over with boulderstone of granite gray and round." His thoughts also turned to the American frontiersman. On March 27, during a solitary automobile trip of several days through northern Italy which induced in him a kind of historical reverie, he wrote: "True aristocracy is the flower of mankind and the American frontiersman achieved almost the pure ideal of that flowering. He faced the vast challenge of raw nature every day before which he could never become petty—every action had to fit into the larger picture; every day he did all of the endless humble tasks relating to animal needs, procuring food, storing and preparing it, cooking it, finding campsites that were sound from many different points of view, and then with all of this he had still to push forward to his larger goal, that of opening the country to those who pressed on behind. This opening of the country, making it available to others less gifted and visionary and strong, is one and the same with the act of revealing and opening up through the language of art that same frontier but in its inner or esoteric sense. The ever-challenging wilderness, beckoning and forbidding at once, never changes and its frontiers are the catalyst for all true and exalting life of every possible kind..." However much European art and Abstract Expressionism continued to affect him, they became subject to the particular dynamics of this vision. Jackson was now a cowboy and frontier artist, although he never stopped working through the meanings and implications of those images.

On April 15, Jackson flew to New York on his way to Cody, with the *Range Burial* on board. In New York it was discovered that the bronze had been broken in transit. With the unveiling just ten days away, Jackson made an urgent call to Nate Hale, an ex-Marine friend and sculptor living in New York, and they took the broken bronze on the next flight west. There, in a barn east of Cody, Hale was able to weld the broken pieces together and Jackson finished the work, blending the patina.

But there was another obstacle. Harold McCracken, director of the Whitney Gallery, refused sight unseen to accept *Range Burial* into the collection. He had seen Jackson's Abstract Expressionist canvases and could not visualize such a creation as he imagined sitting in the same room with a Remington or Russell. (At a meeting some six months earlier McCracken had responded to Jackson's description of the Coe commission by saying that "John Q. Public will not buy death.") Robert Coe,



104. Early sculptural model and drawings for *Range Burial* painting. Kennedy Galleries, New York. 1964

along with his brother Henry and his wife Peg, remained optimistic and the stalemate was finally presented to William Davidson, vice-president of Knoedler's, the prestigious New York art gallery, and an expert in American art who was in Cody for the gallery opening. Davidson agreed to view the bronze in the barn east of Cody. "Nate and I were there in the barn when Davidson arrived," Jackson recalled. "He was like a poker player. He didn't say two words, just looked at the bronze, then left."

Davidson delivered his judgment to McCracken that *Range Burial* was one of the finest works of sculpture of the twentieth century and that refusing to accept it would be a tragedy. Not until the evening before the opening did McCracken capitulate and allow the first quarter of the Coe commission to enter the collection.

For Jackson the *Range Burial* bronze was the first major step in validating his life, in honoring those Marines at Tarawa who served with him and died. Its acceptance was also the first official recognition of the direction he had taken and it resulted in several sales as well as arrangements with the Knoedler Gallery for a one-man show of the bronzes to be mounted in May of 1960. Over the last year and a half he had already created a considerable body of work; now the task at hand was to complete the *Stampede* in bronze.

Returning to Pietrasanta in July 1959, Jackson concentrated on the wax original of *Stampede*, for which he had already created a plasteline model. By late September the wax was finished and by November 1 it had been cast and needed only the



addition of the patina. In his journal Jackson touched on the inner meaning of the surge of cattle, horses, and men. On August 17, explaining why he had "always hungered after reading the life stories of kings and great soldiers as well as great geniuses of writing and poetry," he wrote, "We are each of us an entire cosmos, an infinity, a world, a day, a moment flashed and lost in the ceaseless river of moments, the unending river created of nothing else but unnumbered moments the least of which is in reality some species of total cosmos against whose living presence time falls away as aimlessly and meaninglessly as windblown sand. The question of whether it has been more or less realized is of another and lesser order altogether, confronted with that which I perceive. The quality of being that is one and the same with those tiny flashing moments, so fleeting as to be less than time, so infinitely slight as to be beneath time's ponderous cognizance, the being of each of the minute dancing joyous reflections begotten of the love betwixt sun and water disclosed and destroyed capriciously by the fool wind of anonymous and immortal passion, is the total cosmos." Looking up from his writing at that moment he saw a family of gypsies walking by, "a man, a family as poor materially as any on earth but a man as kingly as Arjuna surging forward on the irresistible wave of Krishna's revelation. He was a king, a full man waging a total war. He had devoured God and was storming the breach. What those eyes of his said to me, what ages of burgeoning life, what roars of unutterable pain spoke out to me and how little, how sadly little of that unmeasurable wealth I could grasp, embrace and absorb."

But Jackson also realized that this revelation could not come through "false ideal images"; it had to come from the core of his own being, from the total war *he* was waging. In late October he approached the heart of the matter: "Just now I realized in a flash that I must embrace the great, frightening presence of death inside of me before I can really live. What is time in the presence of life and light? In the presence of one's own real death I am frightened to death of the real life and death inside me. I walk around it, they are of one piece, infinitely and inseparably entwined, one cannot be embraced without equally embracing the other. We must *live in death* before ever we can be released to *die into life*. To die is not hell, it is infinitely worse in some ways, or so many of us would not choose hell as readily as we do, and yet in the same instant it is infinitely better because the sole path to life runs

through the very center of the awesome dark mouth of one's own death."

*Stampede* encompassed in universal terms the death he had so vividly confronted in the war, completing the cycle of which *Range Burial* is presumably the second half. Both works are held in balance. *Range Burial* is the contemplation of death in life, *Stampede* a recognition of life in death. Instead of silently linked figures around a central void, it presents a solid mass of living forms in which the death of the fallen cowboy is only one incident, a unique stroke in the overall rhythm. His body is dragged into the apocalyptic torrent of life, the "ceaseless river of moments"—he dies into life. At the moment of death the furious movement is at its most intense, and "time falls away aimlessly and meaninglessly."

Several independent figures of cowboys on horses were also completed in the last six months of 1959. In them the boundless interior energy of *Stampede* is transformed into a kinetic geometry. Chaos becomes cosmos. Matter and energy are one. Each configuration of man and horse conforms to the physics of the situation—its properties of weight, mass, speed, inertia, gravity. Jackson's sculptural geometries are three-dimensional constellations which incorporate what has been and will be to finally state what is. The figures move in accordance with the laws of motion that the cowboy, at least for the moment, conforms to and commands. From whatever angle we view these works the action is resolved at the height of tension between mass and movement. In *Settin' Purty* (pls. 216–18) the bucking horse and rider are described in a series of S-curves and arcs that involve every aspect of form and movement in a continuous three-dimensional flow. The horse rises from the earth and returns to it in equal measure, the entire composition held in balance by an overall triangle with its apex in the cowboy's hat. *Steer Roper*, in two versions (pls. 213–15), captures the moment of equilibrium between the forward thrust of the roped steer and the resistance of the horse. The axis of this intricate balance, which curves on the ground plane in space, is the taut, thin line of the rope, the cowboy's lifeline. In *Ropin'* (pl. 221), the resolution is even more drastic. Speed, mass, and action are condensed into an almost two-dimensional plane of straight, crossing, diagonal lines.

The rhythmic structure of these works relates to an important interior theme of Jackson's art. In early 1959 he wrote of images of dancers that "vie for my attention that is taken up now almost ex-



105. *Stampede*, detail. 1959. Patinaed bronze, 15 x 60 x 13½"

clusively by the cowboy figures. Both are one and I shall do them both and yet learn the secret of how they can join and become united in a larger vision." He had in fact painted a number of subjects that involved Spanish dancers or streetsingers since 1953 and he had always been deeply involved with music, beginning with the cowboy ballads he learned as a child and on the Pitchfork, and the blues singing he heard at church and revival meetings with Ruby Mae Woods. His own talent for cowboy singing was encouraged by Diane Hamilton, a collector of Irish folk songs whom he met at a party in Florence in 1957, which resulted in a two-record album for Folkway Records called "Harry Jackson, the Cowboy: His Songs, Ballads

and Brag Talk," recorded without accompaniment in 1958 and released in 1959 (pl. 106). (The success of the album led to a concert at Carnegie Hall in late 1962 with Pete Seeger and other leading folksingers and to a second album, called "Bad Man Ballads," with Seeger and Jack Eliot, for Columbia Records.)

Jackson's first sculpture directly related to music was *Long Ballad* (pls. 260–62), a small seated figure of a cowboy singing and playing the guitar, done in conjunction with the Folkways album in 1959. In 1960 he began a series of dancing and singing figures in bronze that included *Mexican Death Dancer*, 1960 (pls. 263–65); the bas-relief *Mexican Dancers in a Glade*, 1961 (pl. 268); *Sor Capanna* (pls. 266–67), a





106. Folkways record jacket for "Harry Jackson, the Cowboy: His Songs, Ballads & Brag Talk." 1959

monument to the Italian folksinger, 1961–62; *Mexican Piper*, 1964 (pl. 273); and *Mexican Dancer*, 1964 (pls. 272, 274).

The powerful, sinuous rhythms of these figures are also present in the four cowboy bronzes of 1959; they are contained by the same swirling geometry. The raised hat of *Settin' Purty* corresponds almost precisely to the raised tambourine of *Mexican Death Dancer* and the raised hands of *Peon Dancers*. The taut faces of the cowboys are like the death mask of *Mexican Death Dancer*. That face and those rhythms are inside every action, every volume of Jackson's work. A smaller second version of *Range Burial* called *Plantin'* (pls. 235–37), cast in early 1960, significantly brings the figures (reduced from fifteen to nine) and viewer closer to the grave. Death, personified in the mocking dance of *Mexican Death Dancer* and the split-second terror of *Stampede*, is now an intimate reality.

With *Stampede* and the other eleven bronzes that would appear at Knoedler's finished, Jackson returned to his Broome Street studio in New York in January 1960 to commence work on the two vast paintings. Most of his time, however, was spent developing contacts in the United States and preparing for the show. Opening on May 16, the exhibition was greeted with a long, enthusiastic review by John Canaday, art critic of *The New York Times*. All the bronzes were sold, and the new

Amon Carter Museum in Fort Worth ordered second castings of *Range Burial* and *Stampede*, which would be shown, along with other works on loan, in November 1961. Jackson had also developed plans for a monumental version of *Stampede*, half a kilometer in length, to straddle the Colorado-Wyoming border. This vast monument commemorating the cowboys who rode the cattle trails north was never executed, but the idea remains alive in Jackson's vision of the Western landscape.

The makeshift life Jackson had established at the Vignali-Tommasi Foundry now came to an end. By early October 1960, after several months in Wyoming, he was back in Pietrasanta. A month later he moved into a one-room house he had built on an acre of land in a steep-sided valley above Camaiore, just three miles south of the foundry in Pietrasanta. He stayed there through the cold winter months and in early 1961 began making it livable and expanding its modest dimensions.

During this period he worked on the first bronze study for the *Sor Capanna* monument (pl. 266), which had been commissioned for a site in the Trastevere district of Rome, two of the dance bronzes, and four new Western subjects, including the spare, devotional figure of a mounted Indian called *To the Gods* (pls. 223–25). But he was mainly concerned with completing the *Range Burial* canvas begun a year earlier, and in the spring he returned to his studio in New York. By July the monochrome tempera underpainting was completed and he began blocking in the forms of men and horses, changing their sizes and positions as he went. Then on July 16, Jackson abruptly stopped working on the canvas. His wife Joan, with whom he had maintained contact over the past four years, sued for legal separation, and the painting was substantially abandoned until after the final divorce in May 1962. There was the modeling and casting of the *Sor Capanna* monument, the concert at Carnegie Hall, a trip to Fort Worth for his one-man show at the Amon Carter Museum, work on a new commission for a monument to folksingers Woody Guthrie and Leadbelly for Washington Square in New York (pl. 275), which was never realized, and portrait paintings of poet Robert Lax (pl. 109) and singer Bob Dylan (pl. 111), but for the larger and more demanding themes of the Coe commission Jackson was unable to muster his concentration over the long months of litigation, bitterness, and financial drain. When he did return to *Range Burial* it was in a frame of mind that enabled him to realize his original conception.



107. *St. Anthony of Padua, Studies*. 1960. Tempera on paper, 24 x 17". Collection Alessandra Zorogniotti, New York

108. *St. Anthony of Padua*. 1960. Patinaed hydrostone, 24 x 6". Collection Alessandra Zorogniotti, New York







109. *Portrait of Robert Lax*. 1962. Oil on canvas, 35 x 68½". Collection of the artist



110. *Portrait of Dr. Adrian Zorogniotti*. 1962. Oil on canvas, 23¾ x 21¼". Private collection



111. *Bobby Dylan, the Lonesome Blues*. 1962. Tempera on canvas, 54 x 81". Collection of the artist

Opposite page:

112. *Jackson with First Saddle* in his Broome Street studio, New York. May 1960

