113. Harry Jackson in his Broome Street studio, New York, during the early stages of work on *Range Burial* and *Stampede*. 1961

CHAPTER 7

TO JACKSON POLLOCK

After the Knoedler show in May 1960, Jackson had written: "I was certain that sculpture had taken an equal place in my heart alongside painting and that the two were destined to complement and aid each other in the most provocative and as yet undreamt-of ways." In fact, the process had already begun. Sculpture gave him the inner life of his vision, a fully dimensional reality with which to work. The figures he had created, and the *Range Burial* and *Stampede* groups, became his motifs, as Mont Sainte-Victoire had been Cézanne's. Now that the images had attained a certain tangible identity in sculpture, the stage was set for their interpolation back into painting, the filling out of the original conceptions. The final paintings were in fact quite different, but they depended on the essential reality established by the sculptures.

Jackson's progress into the work on *Range Burial* (pls. 120, 244) was considerably eased and encouraged by the changing circumstances of his life. The catalyst of these changes was Sarah Mason of Cross River, New York, whom Jackson met in New York in the spring of 1962 and married in September, just after her twenty-first birthday. They moved into the house in Camaiore, but spent most of the next year in New York, where Jackson recovered from a severe epileptic attack and was finally able to devote all his artistic energy to the completion of the *Range Burial* painting.

Earlier in 1962 he had produced two bronzes of young cowboys—*Gunsil* (pls. 238–40) and *Where the Trail Forks* (pls. 241–43)—that were directly related to the painting rather than the sculpture. By September he had several small overall studies (pls. 114–17), the last of which determined the final disposition of elements in the painting. There were considerable alterations in the composition from the preceding year. The undulating background mountains of the earlier version, which created an ominous, theatrical ambience (pl. 113), were flattened out into an endless prairie that stretched to an absolutely straight horizon line. The figures became both more solitary and more integrated, composed within a monumental pyramidal group around the grave that climaxes in the cowboy on horseback. The "large and open spirit" of the original vision was now unfolding in the work itself.

"The vast lonely distances of the open range," he wrote as the scene emerged on the canvas, "the cold gray early morning light filtering through the still overcast sky with an airy luminescence seen only over great stretches like the plains and the sea—under such conditions there are hardly any shadows and those that do exist are extremely diffuse, never sharp. This is in the spirit of the scene, which must be as prosaic and ordinary everyday as possible. The entire essence of its real drama lies in the complete absence of any of the trappings of apparent drama. The men must express the exhaustion and strain of the stampede mingled with their reflection on the suddenness and finality of death.

"They must be the men shown in the photos of Huffman and Smith and the other documentary photos of those days. Without all the flair and pose and trappings of Russell's or even Remington's men, who are a little too dashing. I want to point to the ordinary, everyday hard-working aspects of these simple but uncommon men who without aid

Opposite page:
Studies for *Range Burial*
114. *First Study.* 1959. Egg tempera on panel, 24 x 48". Collection of the artist

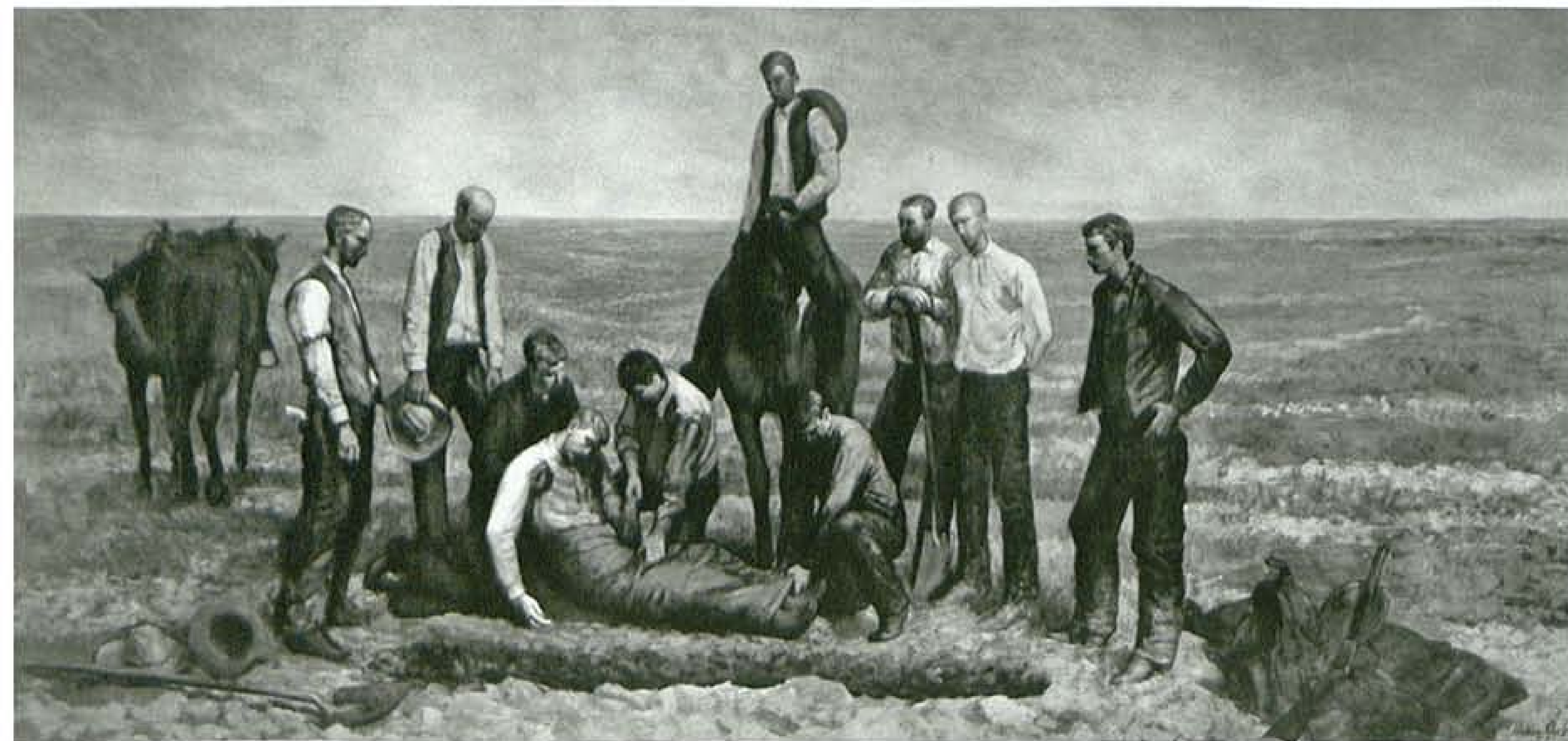
115. *First Version.* 1962. Oil on canvas, 19 x 40". Collection of the artist

116. *Second Version.* 1962. Oil on canvas, 19 x 40". Collection of the artist

117. *Final Study.* 1962. Oil on canvas, 19 x 40". Collection John Ryan, Fort Worth, Tex.

118. Head study for *Range Burial.* 1961. Charcoal on paper, 23 x 18". Collection of the artist

119. Study for dead man in *Range Burial.* 1962. Charcoal on paper, 16 x 20". Collection of the artist



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

of any exterior props rose solely through their love of freedom, absolute independence, individual courage and straight up ornery cussedness to create an empire and a legend within 50 years. It must be understated. The bronze is too formal; the painting must not be in this sense classic but realistic."

Through the early months of 1963 Jackson faced one difficulty after another in mastering the links between the details and the overall conception in the work. His intentions, feelings, and frustrations were expressed in a letter to Cal Todd on April 16: "I really tore off an ambitious chunk because I wanted to make a great painting and not just another picture. 10' x 21' is a lot of canvas to haunt a man who calls himself a painter and ends up doing something ordinary on it. I've got 9 men getting ready to bury a young fellow who had just been killed in a stampede the night before but the problem is different than in the bronze because I had to paint the countryside as well. It had to be lonely and desolate and look like no place in particular. The men are all lifesize but they couldn't be portraits or it would distract from the feeling of timelessness that I wanted most to express....I just can't put down all the deep nameless feelings that such a scene stirs in me, the deep inexpressible dignity of all men, men's awkwardness and tenderness, the contradictory feeling of closeness and communication at the same time one feels the unbreakable apartness and mute isolation of each of us, and how all these things rise overwhelmingly to the fore when one amongst us dies suddenly and we are putting him away..."

All that he wished to express lay between the dead man and the distant horizon, and in the end the structure and meaning of the work focus on the relationship between these two points. The significance of this critical passage is evident in the journal entry of April 19, which describes how the transition was resolved as well as the artist's state of mind in dealing with it: "Two days ago I was unsatisfied with the dead man and the reluctance of the horizon to recede, so I painted them both in vigorously, the dead man too light and the landscape too blue and pale. I thought I had destroyed the work beyond recall....Then all the next day, my birthday, I slept and couldn't get up until this evening and face the canvas. Then I began to glaze the head back into key and the distant landscape was washed over with a touch of black which I then rubbed off until it hit the proper tone and then I modeled the features and lay of the land directly out of and into the remainder of black glaze. It has come full round to be what I have dreamt of from the beginning and never imagined I could achieve. Life is exactly thus. The canvas again has a chance of being what I wished and the landscape and sky now sit where they belong and express an endless sense of distance and unfettered openness that I need to make my point."

This passage was the nexus of all relationships in the painting, the point not only where the gazes and thoughts of the other figures meet, but also from which the landscape spreads out to the horizon. It is literally the center of the drama, significantly off-center, and it evokes the manner in which every element of form, color, space, emotion, and gesture touches upon everything else. The interpenetration of these elements between earth and sky is ultimately absorbed by the line of the horizon, of which the horizontal shadow of the grave is a more finite repetition. Everything can be perceived individually or as part of the whole. The inner circle of kneeling men is linked in the activities of enshrouding and lifting the dead man, the outer circle of standing men is linked in contemplation. The inner group relates to the grave, the outer to the landscape, yet the groups relate to each other and therefore to both inner and outer space. Grave and horizon are parallel and between them is contained every aspect of action and contemplation, history and consciousness. The six standing figures are linked directly to the horizon, which passes through the eyes of three of them and through the saddle of the central figure, the fulcrum of the cowboy's existence. At these points, as throughout the painting in less dramatic ways, every reverberation or intimation of life and death converges. The painting is an endless plane of such reverberations in which space and individual consciousness are merged. The time scale of the total field of space is felt in every detail.

In the midst of painting *Range Burial*, Jackson wrote of his continuing debt to Abstract Expressionism: "No one can know how much I owe to Jackson Pollock. How much I directly descend from him....The endless space he wanted to express...." He also knew Pollock's dilemma. "Several years ago," Jackson had written in 1955, "Pollock spoke of his strong desire to destroy the restricting boundaries of the two-dimensional canvas, and I wrote about the same time, 'Painting must burst out of its own space even at the cost of composition.' Now I believe that such violent desires grow from the inevitable frustrations of too little basic craft coupled with an ardent and active nature.... For one thing, the employment of simple basic rules of perspective allow one to go beyond the limits of the given surface.... All of this is merely the 'window onto the world' idea of the High Renaissance which died in the stagnant bloodless academies.... Yet here is a valid though rusty key to the convulsions of Pollock who thrashes about for a lack of breathing space, his broad farmer's shoulders cramped and threatened with putrification compressed onto the 'picture plane' of latter-day Parisian theory. Pollock would lead us all if only he had been taught to be a good painter and draughtsman before the inner urge completely overwhelmed his meager, almost nonexistent formal powers."

In his own work Jackson expressed the wish "to reunite all of the pieces that have been scattered far and wide when the art of painting was fragmented and divided up among the specialists. The compositional force of Kline, the romantic atmospheres of Rothko, the pungent elegance of De Kooning, the passion of Pollock." For Jackson it was not a matter of recombining these exclusive provinces but of establishing a correlative of human existence within the universal field of space and time that had been opened up. The space-time continuum or entity of *Range Burial*, though expressed in more recognizable and less exclusive terms, is no less convincing than that of Pollock or Rothko. Its restored dimension is depth—the bête noire of Abstract Expressionism—and the re-employment of traditional disciplines allows us to see and feel the closer reality of human society and individuality in continuity with infinite, universal space. The grouping of men emerges from the landscape almost as a natural feature of it and yet distinct from it, as "simple and truly heroic as those riders and that land and their primitive story are. I think in terms of the heroes and warriors in Genesis or Homer." The figures exist on the edge of time and space, almost in our own time and space. They represent the brief, tenuous, heroic history of mankind.

On October 28, 1963, Jackson moved the painting to the end wall of his Broome Street studio, and "the vision confirmed my hopes more than anything else. Perhaps these past two years or actually three have not been ill spent and my dreams have some basis. I am cruelly lacking in technical capacity but the spirit and dignity and direct uncompromising aim are there." *Range Burial* was shown for the first time in January 1964 at the Kennedy Galleries, Jackson's official dealer, along with preparatory studies and the two bronzes of *Range Burial* and *Stampede*. Critics in New York were now for the most part involved in a scene dominated by Pop art and the beginnings of Minimalism, and were unable to recognize the singularity and complexity of Jackson's achievement—but his audience continued to grow. Acclaim for the painting came from several sources, including Thomas Hart Benton, who wrote in a letter to Jackson that "it may be one of our great American paintings.... An artist who has the crust to buck the 'mainstream' has to be something more than an artist, and that more is more important than being an artist—and in the end may make the more consequential artist."

In February the exhibition moved to the National Collection of Fine Arts in Washington, D.C., where it had the enthusiastic support of John Walker, director of the National Gallery of Art, and Paul Manship, the dean of traditional American sculptors. The painting was finally exhibited in May at the Whitney Gallery of Western Art in Cody, with a dedication speech by Walker, and entered the collection that is now part of the Buffalo Bill Historical Center.

Jackson spent most of this time in the United States accompanying the exhibition and traveling on his own, including a visit in March to the Kansas City home of Benton, whom he had first met in 1961. In September he resumed work on *Stampede* (pls. 128, 256), which had been stacked in his New York studio since January 1960, when the canvas was first stretched. Before the end of the year the underpainting was completed, the forms of cattle and riders were blocked out, and several overall studies were done, along with drawings for individual figures.

While most of 1965 was devoted to *Stampede*, there were other important developments before and during this period that were to broaden the scope and alter the nature of Jackson's activities considerably. The first was a new commission, on a scale still larger than that of the Coe project. It was awarded to Jackson in August 1964 by the Richard King Mellon Foundation in Pittsburgh on the recommendation of John Walker, who served as a consultant to the foundation. Involved were several bronze sculptures, seven floor mosaics, and a 56-foot mural to curve around the 14-foot high rear wall of the new Fort Pitt Museum, situated in the Golden Triangle of Point State Park in downtown Pittsburgh, where the Allegheny and Monongahela rivers join to form the Ohio. The mural was to commemorate the story of human culture in that area and the change wrought by the decisive British victory in the French and Indian Wars (1756–63) at Fort Duquesne, the forerunner of Pittsburgh. Around the central scene of battle was to be ranged a complex historical panorama of the forest-framed frontier landscape, incorporating scenes of the original Indian inhabitants; French traders, trappers, and missionaries; George Washington's expedition against the French of 1753–54; and the frontiersmen and their families who finally settled the land. The project, titled *River, Road and Point* (pl. 279), was immensely complicated, and Jackson began almost immediately with his preliminary work: historical research, compositional sketches, drawings of flora and fauna in western Pennsylvania, and even some sculptural models. But continuous work on the commission had to wait until October 1965, by which time *Stampede* was virtually finished.

The second development, Jackson's establishment of his own foundry, was another step toward economic independence and the goal of bringing every aspect of his creative life under his own control. The foundry was set up in October 1964, partly in response to the growing demand for his work. Equipment was moved in next to the house and studio in Camaiore, and Vignali's experienced foreman, Ivo Ricci, quit the Pietrasanta foundry to manage the new operation. He was joined a week later by Alfredo "Domé" Domenici, who is now master bronze finisher at Jackson's foundry. The first bronze castings done at Camaiore were *Gunsil*, *Where the Trail Forks*, and *Cowboy's Meditation* (pls. 245–46). *Frontiersman* (pls. 288–89), a figure from the Fort Pitt commission, was the first new work created and cast there, in February 1965.

It was also about this time that Jackson began to produce painted versions of his bronzes. In December 1963 he had painted the plasteline original of *Cowboy's Meditation*, a figure derived from the mounted cowboy in the *Range Burial* painting. This fragile model was displayed under glass in the 1964 Kennedy show and subsequently four hydrostone

121. Jackson with painted versions of *Cowboy's Meditation*. Designs for Fort Pitt mosaics on back wall. 1964

castings were also painted in realistic colors, "because I wanted to show what color the horse was." The material proved to be too fragile, however, and Jackson determined to paint only sculptures that had been cast in metal. Since the first polychrome bronze of *Cowboy's Meditation* (pl. 121), which appeared in late 1964, he has produced most of his work in both painted and unpainted (patinaed), versions, including three done before 1964: *Gunsil*, painted in 1964 (pl. 238); *Bronc Stomper*, in 1968 (pl. 207); and *Stampede*, in 1969 (pl. 254–55).

In adopting this practice, Jackson was again questioning one of the dogmas of modern art, that of "truth to materials." Painted sculpture, of course, has a long history, which goes back at least as far as ancient Egypt. It was only in the Renaissance that unpainted sculpture became the general rule, based on the misconception that classical Greek and Roman sculpture had been unpainted when actually the paint had simply weathered away in the intervening centuries. For Jackson the addition of color was a natural outgrowth of his involvement in both painting and sculpture and of his desire somehow to join them in a way that would allow painting to "bust out of its own space" and sculpture to merge with a larger realm of space and color.

These experiments with applying color also fed into Jackson's work on *Stampede*. Between early October and late December 1964, he completed several large-scale studies in various media and techniques (pls. 122–25). In the earliest of these he blocked out landscape, storm, cattle, horses, and men in swirling, impressionistic fields of color. Later studies begin to delineate individual forms while retaining the primal compositional energy of the first two, and the last gives full volume to every figure in the painting, using the bronze of *Stampede* almost literally as a model. In the process Jackson joined an abstract, painterly conception and a lin-

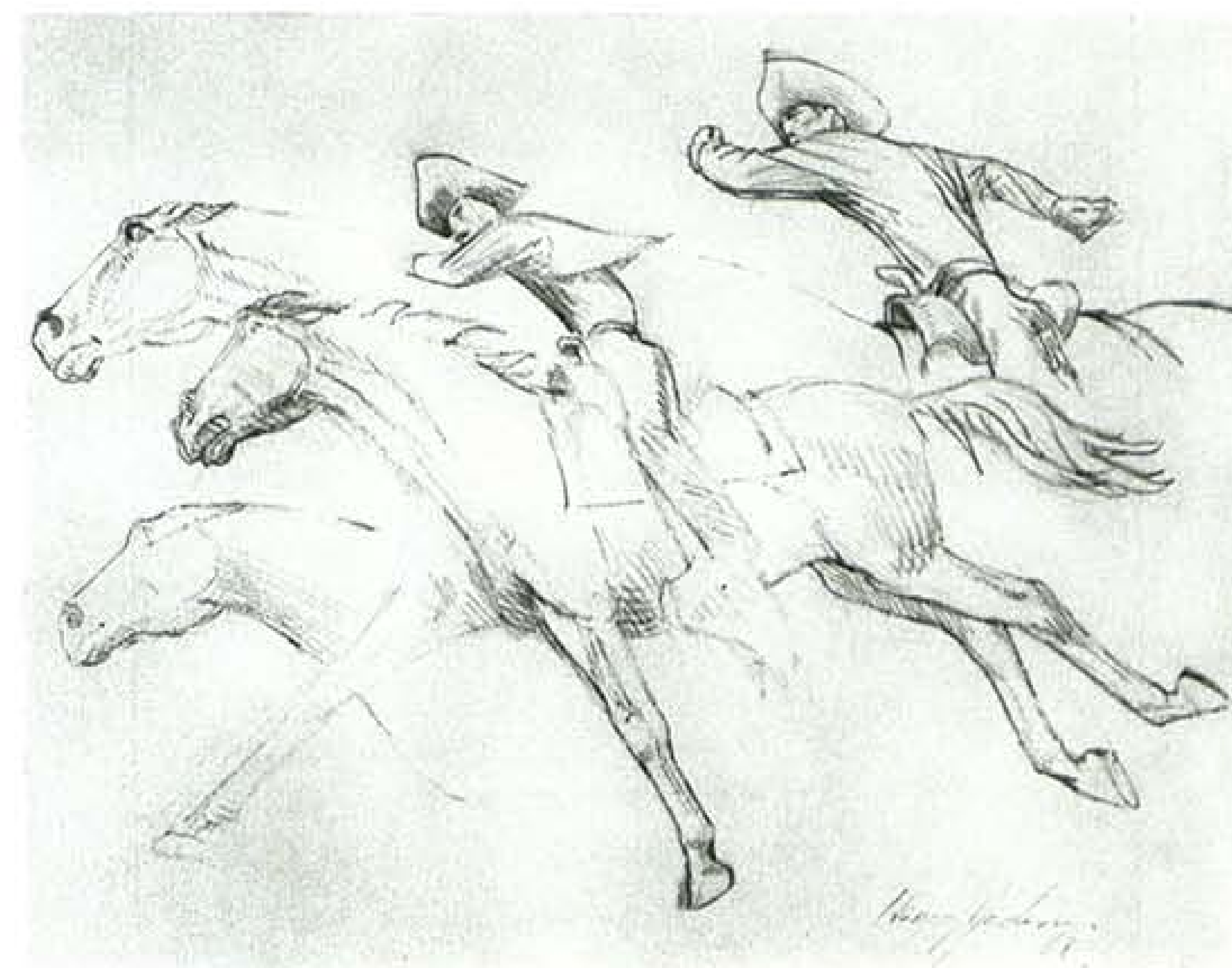
Studies for *Stampede*

122. 1964. Egg tempera on panel, 22 x 48". Private collection

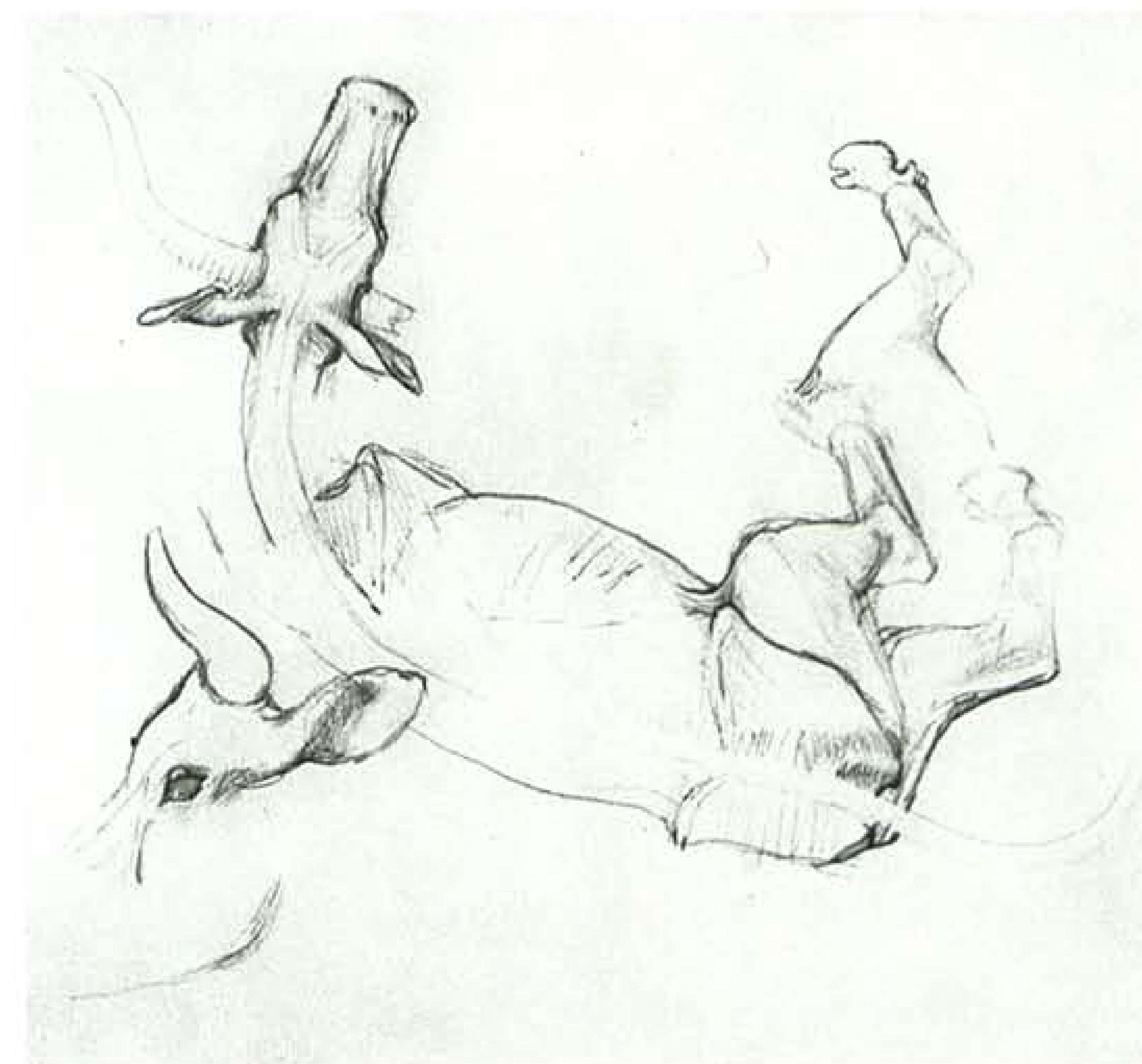
123. 1964. Oil on canvas, 19 x 40". Collection of the artist

124. 1964. Oil on canvas, 19 x 40". Collection of the artist

125. *Final Study.* 1965. Egg tempera and oil on panel, 22 x 48". Private collection



126. Study after rider in *Stampede.* 1968. Red chalk on paper, 18 x 14". Collection of the artist



127. *Fallen Steer.* 1964. Pencil on paper, 9½ x 10¾". Collection of the artist

ear, graphic conception with the three-dimensional sculptural reality. He was working toward the center of the subject, which lay somewhere in all three approaches, trying "to capture the wild force, to capture the drive and weight of it, its surge, and yet set it in deep space and upon the hard flat ground that can contain and bear it; how to individuate the beasts and yet not tear them apart from the single wild charging mass of which they are a part. To show the dreadful, violent imminent death of the fallen rider, the hopeless certainty of it, yet not to state it too strongly but just exactly enough; the irresistible power and the anonymous caprice of the storm coupled with the cool indifference of the vast land beyond; to make paint say this as best I can—is that not a marvelous task?"

This statement stood at the beginning of the last intense effort on the painting, which extended from late December 1964 through the end of September 1965. At first there were technical difficulties with underpainting and glazing to be solved. More compelling were the problems that followed in adjusting every detail to the total vision, with changes in color, tone, definition, and the positioning of figures being made as he attacked each new area of the canvas. It was a constant process of breaking down the elements and then reweaving them into the total fabric, as his journals reveal:

"January 5, 1965. Began working on the falling horse. Laid in with light mid-gray, modeled the light mass with very light gray.

"January 8. Heightened several steers with white and a touch of raw umber. Heightened part of the light mass on the ground." Then, a week later, after working over the entire sky: "Laid in entire earth surface and gully and water, laid a slate-blue gray mid-tone over all the major shade and shadow passages."

Having "repainted front man, not happy with it," Jackson left the Broome Street studio for Italy, not returning to the painting until March, when he "started with the falling horse and rider, horse's head coming well.... Have worked several days to establish the overall color.... Began distant horizon and clouds, left side.... Continued hills and sky. Prussian blue, black and white. Always work into a wet retouch film of painting medium. Worked up distant rider in raw umber and white.

"March 18. Changed the horizon and hills. Worked on gray clouds and rain in left foreground. Sarah helped me get the dark broad accent under the foremost cloud and it works perfectly.

"Finished distant rider, changed his entire placement. Worked wet in wet. Slicker is Winsor Newton naples yellow and white set into a raw umber lay-in. It works well.

"Changed front rider, lowered his arm and removed left arm completely.

"March 22. Finished entire sky, the rain is effective at last. Worked on distant steers lost in the darkest part of the storm. Must get the tonal relations just right, not too delicate and fragile, yet not too emphatic. The mass of steers must be there, tossing and surging yet very much obscured by the storm. How deeply I love and feel this work, yet how impossible a task it is.

"I want to make a great work of surging violence that is lost in the enormous impersonality and timelessness of the world. Yet I want it to be about horses and death and steers and men and great wide open land, and the sound of rain and hooves and horns. I'm getting there slowly. The color as a whole is beginning to work.

"March 26. Continued the working on the profiles of the entire line of farthest steers and finished them. They are lost and found within the heavy sheets of rain and almost unseen in places yet the long, slightly declining horizontal line of them stretching the full length of the canvas has not been lost."

In April he began working with the men, horses, and foreground cattle. "Defined the group behind front rider and the cut bank. They are all in, but the color is a bit too flat and sweet. Worked up the lead steers but they are not right either. At this point, the entire effect can lose power with each stroke that tends too much towards illustration and forgets to work plastically. How fine that line is when I define it according to my desires. I haven't yet begun to scratch the surface of what sculpting can teach me of drawing and painting forms in space. Began to model the rear rider with a lighter scumble over the medium warm glaze applied a few days ago and now set up. What numbers of layers I've placed on that horse."

Work again was dropped, with trips to Italy and Oklahoma City, and Jackson returned to finish *Stampede* in September 1965. "Just repainted the entire line and silhouette of distant cattle in the eye of the storm. Also the hat, face, and shirt of the rear rider. Tomorrow I'll finish his chaps and the horse and bridle and reins, also boots on fallen man and reins on front horse. Then I must set in the horns on the buckskin steer and work on the jacket of the front rider. On Thursday the 30th, the back end should be dry enough for glazing on the

128. *Stampede*. 1960–66. Oil on canvas, 10 x 21'. Whitney Gallery of Western Art, Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyo.

storm. Friday, I can glaze the darks in the entire mass and Saturday, the photographer can come at last."

The result of Jackson's intense efforts is a painting of almost unrelieved intensity in which the cataclysmic event fills the entire foreground plane and then dissolves into the all-encompassing storm. Its relentless motion contrasts with the relentless stillness of *Range Burial*, and yet they exist in the same landscape and define the same lives. Rather than a grave fixed in relation to the horizon, now the ground is broken by a deeply cut gulch rushing out of the center. The architectural grouping of figures around the grave has been shattered into uncountable fragments, describing an atomic substructure that seemingly has no end. And yet, on the far-off horizon the landscape remains unchanged and unaffected, as timeless and indifferent as it is vast. The two visions, of absolute stasis and absolute flux, are both contradictory and necessary to each other. Together they comprise a complete cycle of life and death, of the deterioration and regeneration of matter—a kind of cowboy yin and yang born out of the unanswerable questions posed at Tarawa. They are the full expression of the forces that might be contained in a single human figure, "a powerfully masculine art, an inspiring full-bodied art of full surging insistent forms, an art that is full of life. The wonder and glory and terror of life, art that is a body alive with heart and red blood, finally an art that aims at being as completely and as magnificently and vitally human as possible."

With the completion of *Stampede*, Jackson's work on the Coe commission came to a close. Throughout the painting's creation the artist repeatedly found his thoughts returning to Jackson Pollock, his friendship and guidance, and his own attempts to capture on canvas the rushing torrent of a cattle stampede in his *Mural* of 1943, a painting that had haunted Jackson from the first time he had viewed it. In the lower right-hand corner of *Stampede*, he inscribed: "Dedicated in memory of the painter Jackson Pollock."