



## CHAPTER 8

# RIVER, ROAD AND POINT

The *Stampede* painting ended what Jackson calls his "primitive" period. In it were played out all the unresolved energies he carried within him from childhood into the center of cowboy life, the war, abstract painting, and the European tradition. *Stampede* was not a resolution either, but it somehow combined everything he knew and revealed to him, in the death of the young cowboy, his own death as part of a total experience of the world. The intersection of forces now included him as well as those who had died around him at Tarawa.

In the summer of 1966 Jackson's entire output of Western art was shown in a retrospective exhibition, the first one-man show at the newly opened National Cowboy Hall of Fame in Oklahoma City. Both *Stampede* and *Range Burial* were shown along with all the preparatory drawings, painted studies, and bronzes.

In the meantime, Jackson had already begun work on the Fort Pitt mural commission. The seven floor mosaics (pl. 130), which schematically represent the principal modes of life on the eighteenth-century frontier along with William Pitt's coat-of-arms, had been finished in September 1965 and were installed at the museum in early 1966. In the last three months of 1965, Jackson worked on three scale models for the murals in ratios of quarter-inch, half-inch, and one-inch to one foot for the overall length of 56 feet, 4 inches and height of 12 feet, 2 $\frac{3}{8}$  inches of the actual mural (pls. 276–78). Finally a movable wall on pulleys was erected in his Camaiore studio on which full-scale drawings could be made.

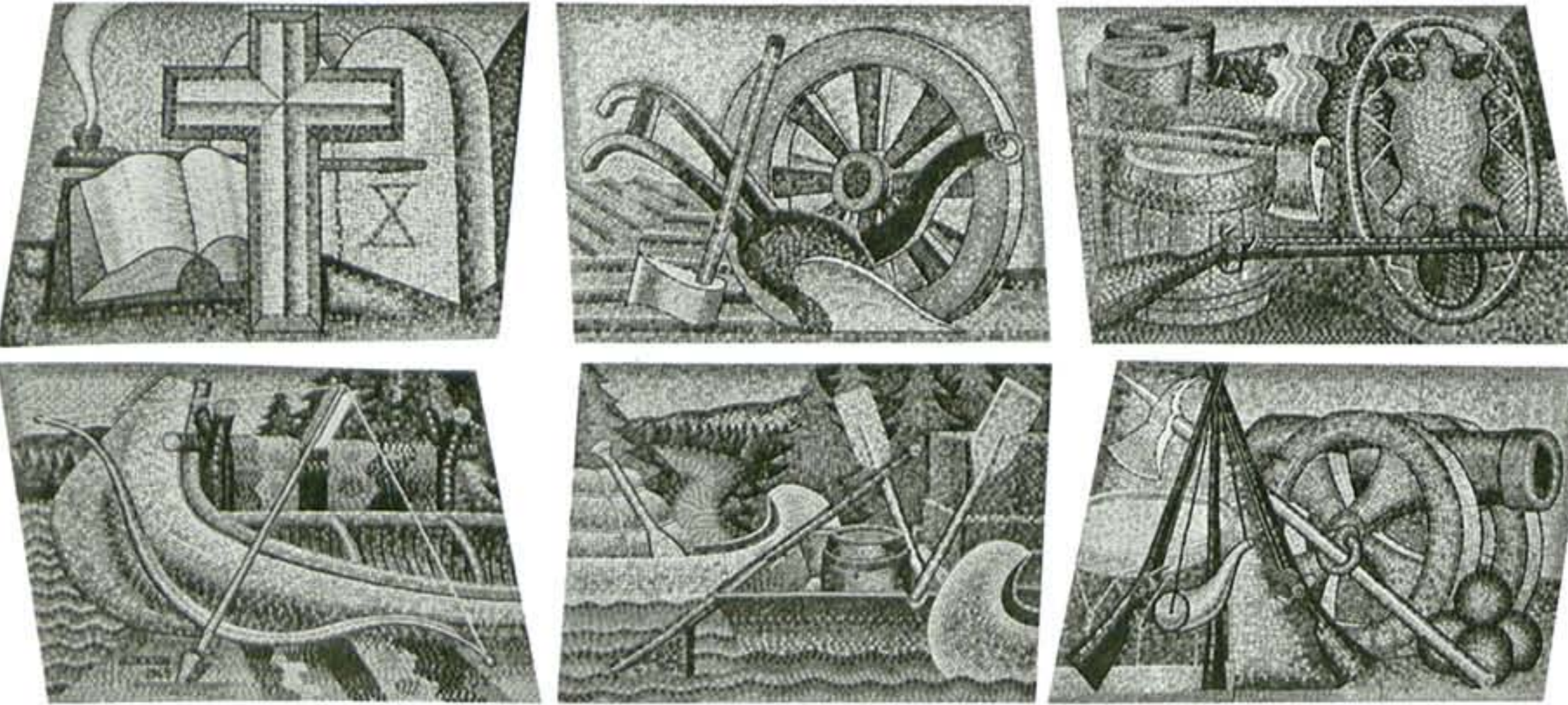
Thomas Hart Benton spent six weeks with Jack-

son during this period. They worked together in Jackson's studio and traveled through northern Italy, revisiting the works of Renaissance masters to whom they were both so powerfully drawn. They talked about painting in deep, illusionistic space, and especially about the use of models in planning a mural, a technique that Benton and other regionalists such as Grant Wood had used since the 1930s. He introduced Jackson to the "logical procedure" of applying local tones and colors directly to the models, so that the total effect of the modeled figure in natural light and shadow can be more readily seen and incorporated into the general atmospheric tone of the mural. While he was in Camaiore, Benton demonstrated the technique by creating a painted sculptural model in conjunction with his painting *Ten-Pound Hammer*, which he also made there. (Jackson's foundry later cast a full patinated edition of Benton's model, called *John Henry*, pl. 132). Jackson had already used color in his sculpture, and now began to translate it back into his painting. It was another step toward joining the two media and toward a new, more rational approach.

Sarah's and Harry's first child was conceived while the Bentons were in Italy, and on July 31, 1966, Matthew Jackson was born "at 3:20 this morning. He weighs 5 $\frac{1}{2}$ -lbs., small but well-proportioned."

Soon after Matthew's birth, Benton insisted that Jackson renew his acquaintance with the sculptor Jacques Lipchitz, whom Harry had first met in 1950 in New York. "Jacques Lipchitz has a villa near us and uses the old foundry. I have gotten to know





130. Floor mosaics for *River, Road and Point* depicting William Pitt's coat-of-arms (top) and the Missionary, the Settler, the Trader, the Indian, the Riverman, and the Soldier (clockwise from upper left). 1965-66. Fort Pitt Museum, Pittsburgh



131. Thomas Hart Benton with Jackson in the latter's Camaiore studio. Benton works on a study for *Ten-Pound Hammer*; an early study for *River, Road and Point* is in the background. 1965

him a bit in the past few weeks and the more I see of him the more I like him," Jackson wrote. "He is a terribly warm and most surprisingly loving individual of great human perception and intuition. He is unique, genuine and wonderfully refreshing. He is full of thoughtfulness of others and quite proper and old-fashioned in his unassuming and unself-conscious manners.

"He is, amazingly enough, completely outspoken in his condemnation of all abstract art. He underscored its purely formalistic or hedonistic ends and the futility of all Art for Art's sake that it feeds upon. He says, 'All art whatsoever in all ages is aimed at communication and if not is mere masturbation.' He was greatly impressed with my abilities both as a sculptor and as a painter but advised me to choose one or the other as he said, 'Today we can't any longer be Renaissance men and we must choose a more select and narrow path and walk it steadily, otherwise any chance at mastery will elude us.' He also is concerned with my foundry



132. Thomas Hart Benton. *John Henry*. 1965. Patinaed bronze, height 11"





133. Harry Jackson with his son Matthew in front of a full-scale study for the Trapper panel of River, Road and Point. Early 1967

under Ivo's management and feels it takes too much time from my work. He seems most sincerely interested. He said, "The important thing is to work constantly and with as few distractions as possible and by never worrying about inspiration; inspiration will come. Rise early, question little and work hard."

There was a direct correlation between the demands of the Fort Pitt commission and the changes that were taking place naturally in Jackson's life and art. For the first time in his life he had a complete family, a constellation of people to whom he was connected. In his art he was dealing with a subject that extended beyond his own direct experience. The center shifted. He was no longer within the work, but rather viewing space, time, people, and events from a more objective and historical distance. A certain clarity was necessary to sustain the longer lines of connection between himself and every aspect of the work, a clarity provided by historical, anatomical, geographical, and biological research as well as technical research concerning medium support and the scaling up of drawings



134. Sarah Mason Jackson, Study. 1966. Pencil on paper, 9 3/4 x 10 3/4". Collection of the artist

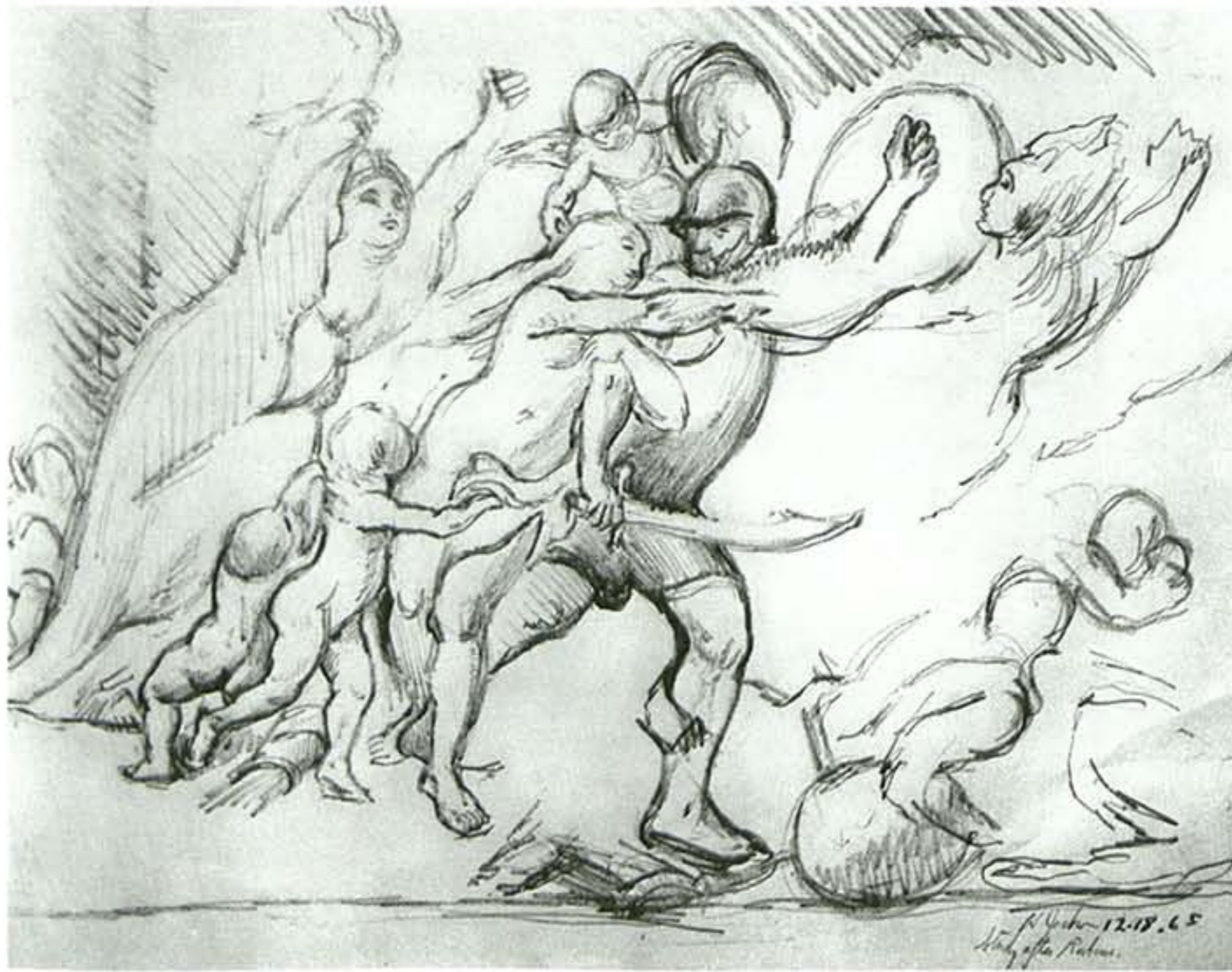


135. Sarah, Bust. 1966. Patinaed bronze, 21 1/4 x 16 x 10 3/4"

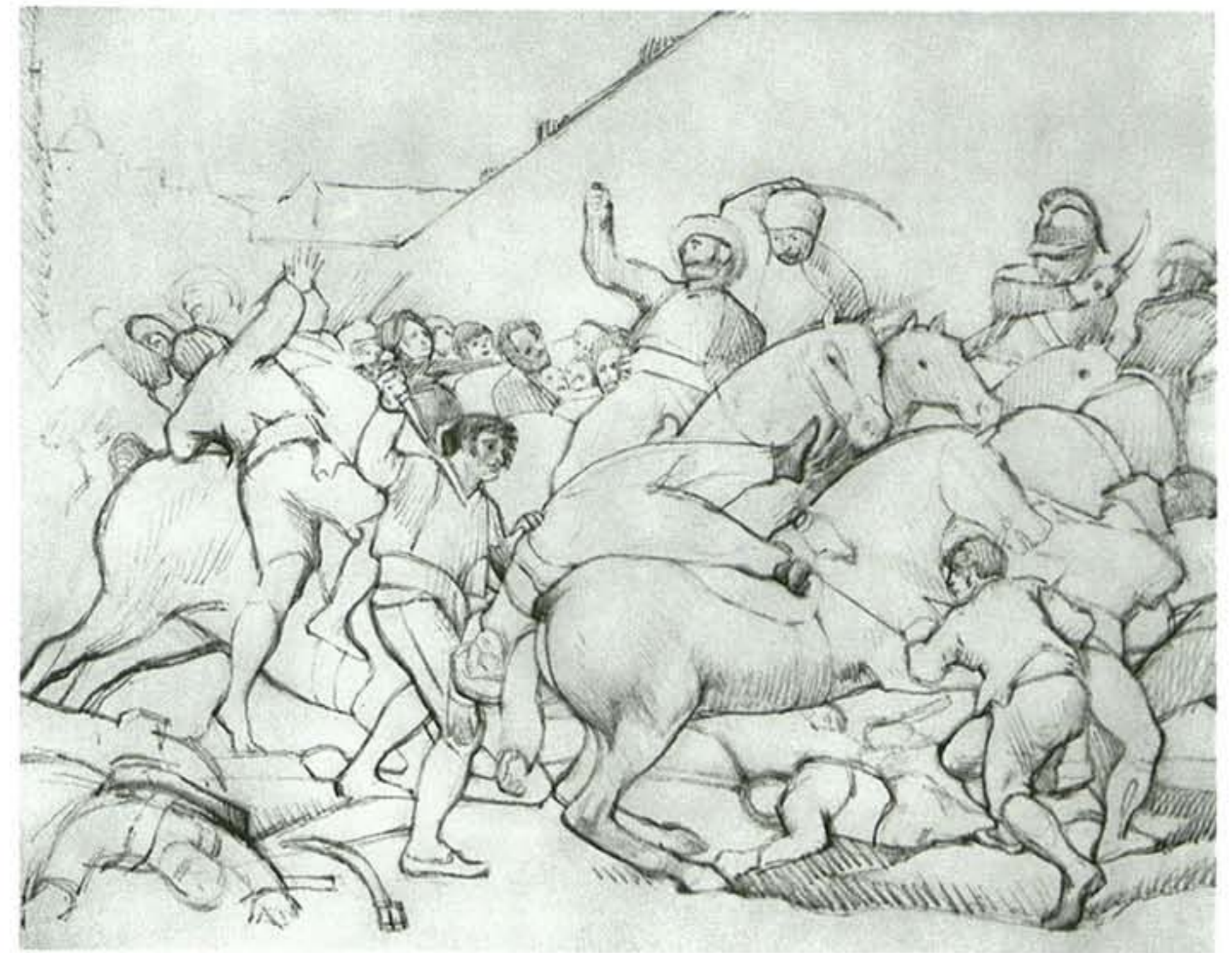


Studies done in Cook's Forest, Pa., for River, Road and Point. Aug. 19-21, 1964  
Pen on paper: 136. Beech tree branch. 137. Hemlock and beech trees. 138. White oak





139. Study after Rubens' *The Consequences of War* in the Pitti Palace, Florence. Dec. 18, 1965. Pencil on paper, 9½ x 10½". Collection of the artist



140. Study after Goya's *The Second of May, 1808* in the Prado, Madrid. 1966. Pencil on paper, 10 x 13". Collection of the artist

and sculptural models. The vastness of the project and the information that went into it required a kind of rational order that became part of the transformation of his art, the reordering of his vision in terms of a broader historical and aesthetic perspective.

The convergence of universal forces and individual existence in *Stampede* and *Range Burial* now became a multiple convergence of forces, the sum total of which is civilization. "At last I am into the kind of work I've been waiting for all my life," he wrote on August 23, 1966. "A primary human theme dealing with war and peace, victory and defeat, the silent tenacious will to live and plant and grow, contrasted and complemented by the shock and blood of violent death. These are the obsessive taproot themes that artists have dealt with from the

beginning of time up until Delacroix. Now at last I feel I am embracing the work of a complete man and an artist at the same time. The French and Indian Wars are as contemporary as Vietnam and as ancient and timeless as Xenophon's expedition into Turkey. An attempt to express these challenging central themes hasn't been attempted by a major painter for 100 years, with 3 notable exceptions: the Mexican school (mainly Orozco and Rivera), Picasso in his *Guernica*, and Tom Benton in the Truman Library mural and his American History series."

The sense of continuous focus that had evolved in Jackson's work since the World War II combat pictures now encompassed an even wider range of phenomena—defining individual lives as well as the life of civilization as a whole. The mural is, in

fact, a series of intersections embodied by the confluence of the Allegheny and Monongahela rivers, depicted near the center of the work above the scene of the battle for Fort Duquesne. This establishes the point at which all the opposing forces—war and peace, victory and defeat, life and death, British and French, European and Indian, man and nature, winter and summer—meet to describe the frontier and the emergence of American civilization. There are no incidental events or figures; everything is part of the structure of space, time, and historical continuum.

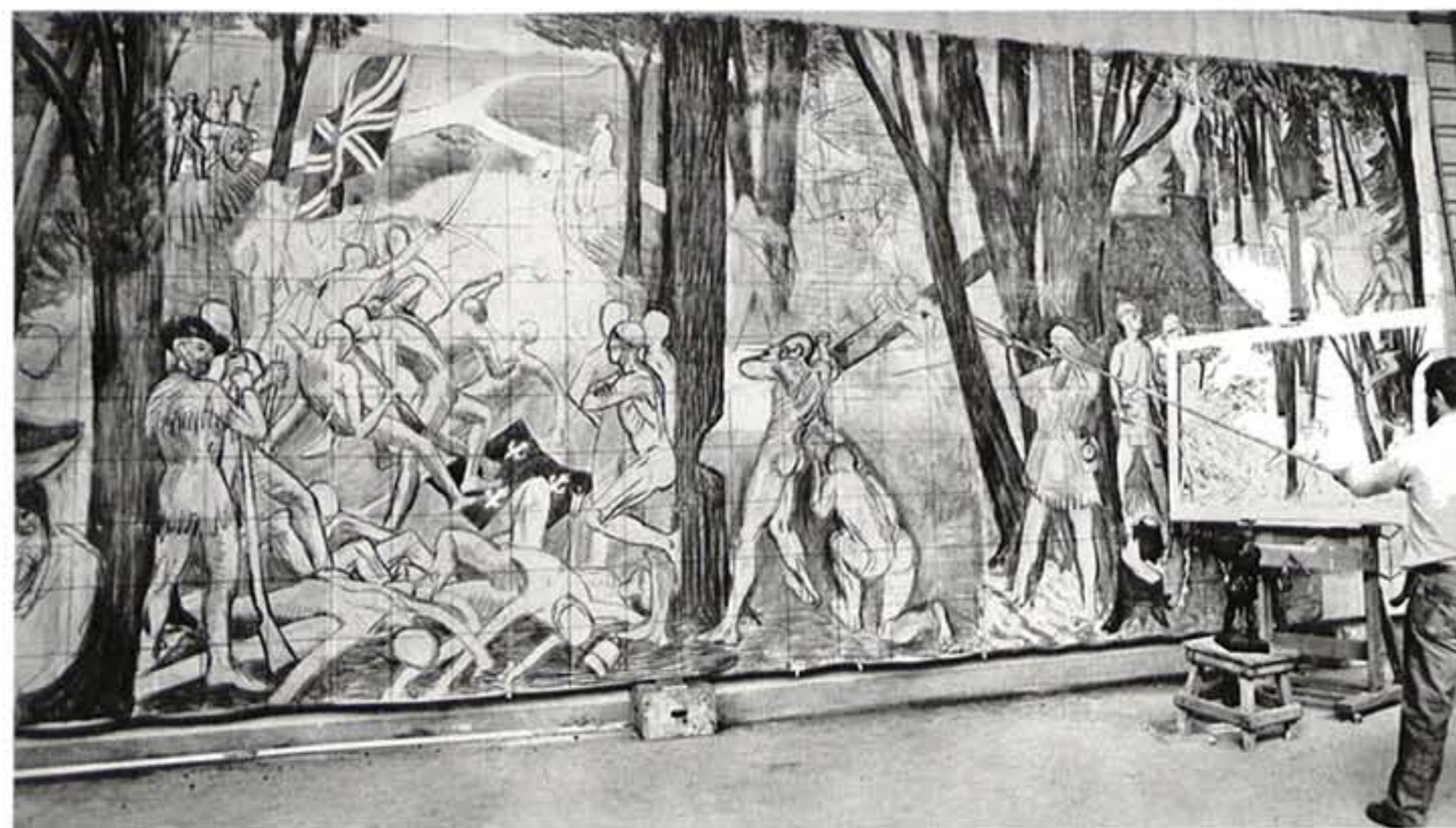
The pictorial expression, or "organic structure," of this idea recalls the centralized composition and all-over continuity of *The Italian Bar*, but is far more complex. Each of the eight panels contains a separate episode, conceived as a distinct entity in its

own deep space and framed by the trunks of trees, which are themselves representations of both structure and organic growth. These scenes are like corridors of time and space extended in depth to a point that is out of view and out of time. And yet they are all joined compositionally into the larger time and space of the mural. The lifesize foreground figures of the Iroquois guide, French trader, British Highland soldier, Algonquin chief, log splitter, and frontiersman stand like sentinels at the thresholds of these spatial tableaux, creating a frieze-like effect of figures along the frontal plane of the painting and providing the transition from real space into the illusionistic space of the painting. In this kind of theatrical setting, the figures become prototypes, embodying in monumental human form the complex motives of the painting





141. Jackson drawing a study of the central battle scene of *River, Road and Point* from the sculptural model. 1967



142. Referring to the sculpture of the *Frontiersman* and a smaller drawn study, Jackson works on the mural-size drawing with charcoal in a long bamboo drawing stick. 1967



143. An assistant works on the mural-size enlargement while Jackson completes the third color study. 1968



144. An early stage of painting on the final mural. 1968

itself, combining sculptural and painterly values in a dramatic way—primary figures in primary colors. Jackson also made bronzes, both painted and patinated versions, derived from several of these figures—including *Frontiersman*, 1965 (pls. 288–89); *Iroquois Guide*, 1967 (pls. 280–82); *Trapper*, 1968, '70, and '71 (pls. 283–87); and *Algonquin Chief and Warrior*, 1971 (pls. 290–91).

Jackson's total commitment to the permanence of his work on the Fort Pitt mural ultimately put him in conflict with the Mellon Foundation trustees. When they insisted on a wall fresco, the artist balked. "I have had to reject the idea of doing a 'mural' as the word is traditionally defined if this work is to survive," he wrote on June 26, 1966. "Today's world doesn't permit one to paint permanently on immovable walls for two reasons: first, it is most unlikely that any wall whatsoever will exist for more than fifty years, especially if that wall happens to be an interior one, and secondly, the increasing ravages of polluted atmosphere make the easy dismantling and removal of large painted surfaces for the purpose of cleaning and protection an absolute necessity."

For a time the museum steering committee conceded and accepted the artist's idea, presented in





145. Childhood drawing of a hunter. ca. 1931. Blue crayon on paper. Collection of the artist

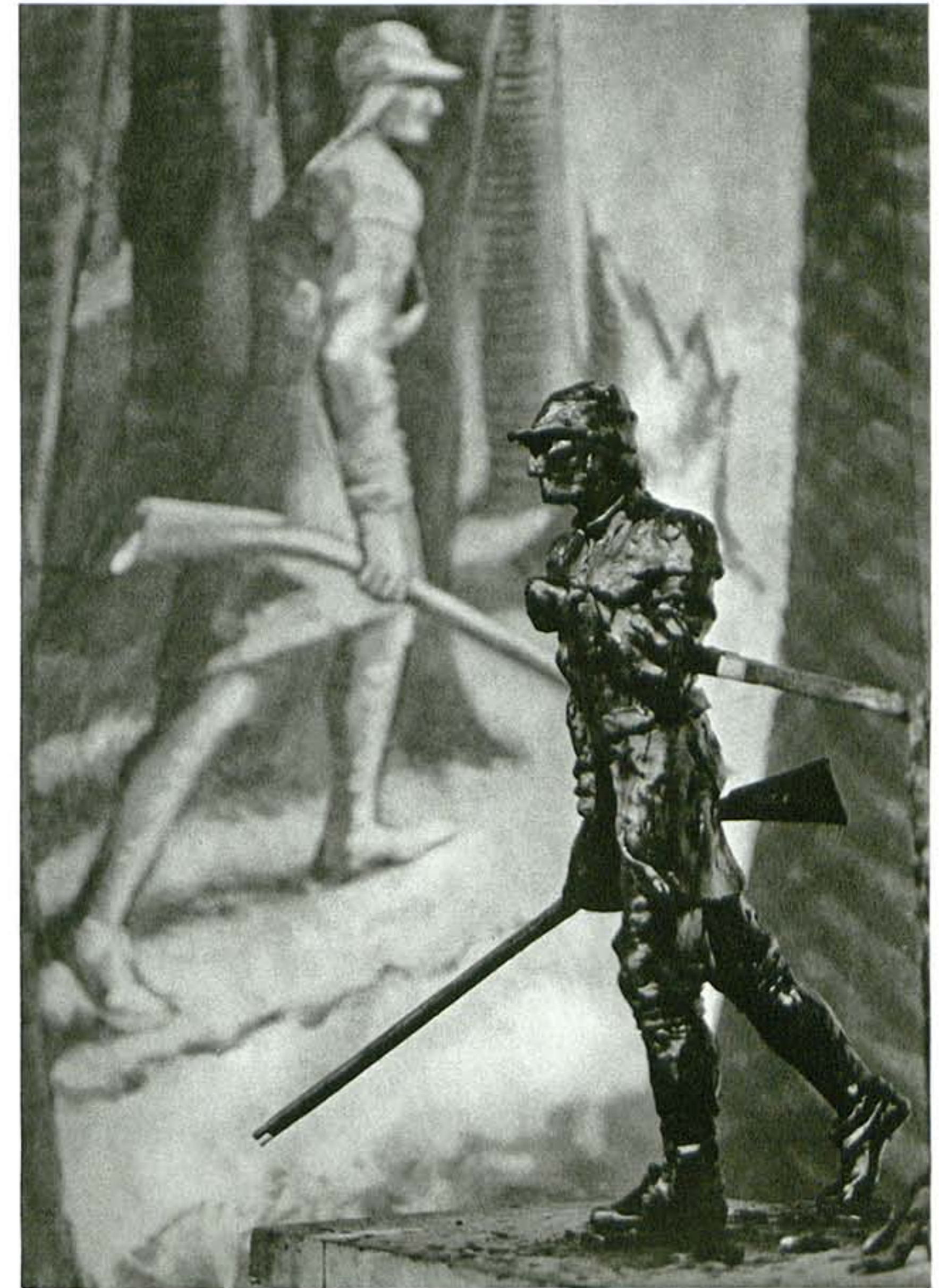


146. *Victory Thru Air Power* (Tarawa, November 20–24, 1943). 1944. Ink and wash on paper. Collection of the artist

August 1966, of mounting eight movable flat canvases abutting on the curved wall, instead of painting directly on a permanent surface. Jackson worked on the portable panels for several years and by 1969 was well on his way to completing them. In 1970 he was given a five-year extension, but the project was periodically marred by misunderstanding and conflict. Jackson's proposal for using smaller removable panels, thereby reducing the overall size, was never clearly understood by the board. Then, in 1973, a flood inundated the Fort Pitt Museum, which lies upon the floodplain at the fork of the rivers. The floor mosaics, already installed, were slightly damaged by the flood-

waters, and the high-water mark on the museum walls reinforced the artist's concern about mural panels painted in oil on canvas, let alone a fresco applied directly to the walls.

By 1975 the Mellon Foundation trustees refused to deal further with the issue, although by then they had in their possession several of the sculptures that had come out of the project. Jackson also gave them several bronzes from his one-man exhibition at the museum in 1971. Today the eight panels of the painting are stacked in Jackson's studio in Camaiole, and Pittsburgh still awaits one of the major historical murals of the twentieth century.



147. Wax model of *The Trapper Study* in front of unfinished panel of *River, Road and Point*. 1967