



CHAPTER 9

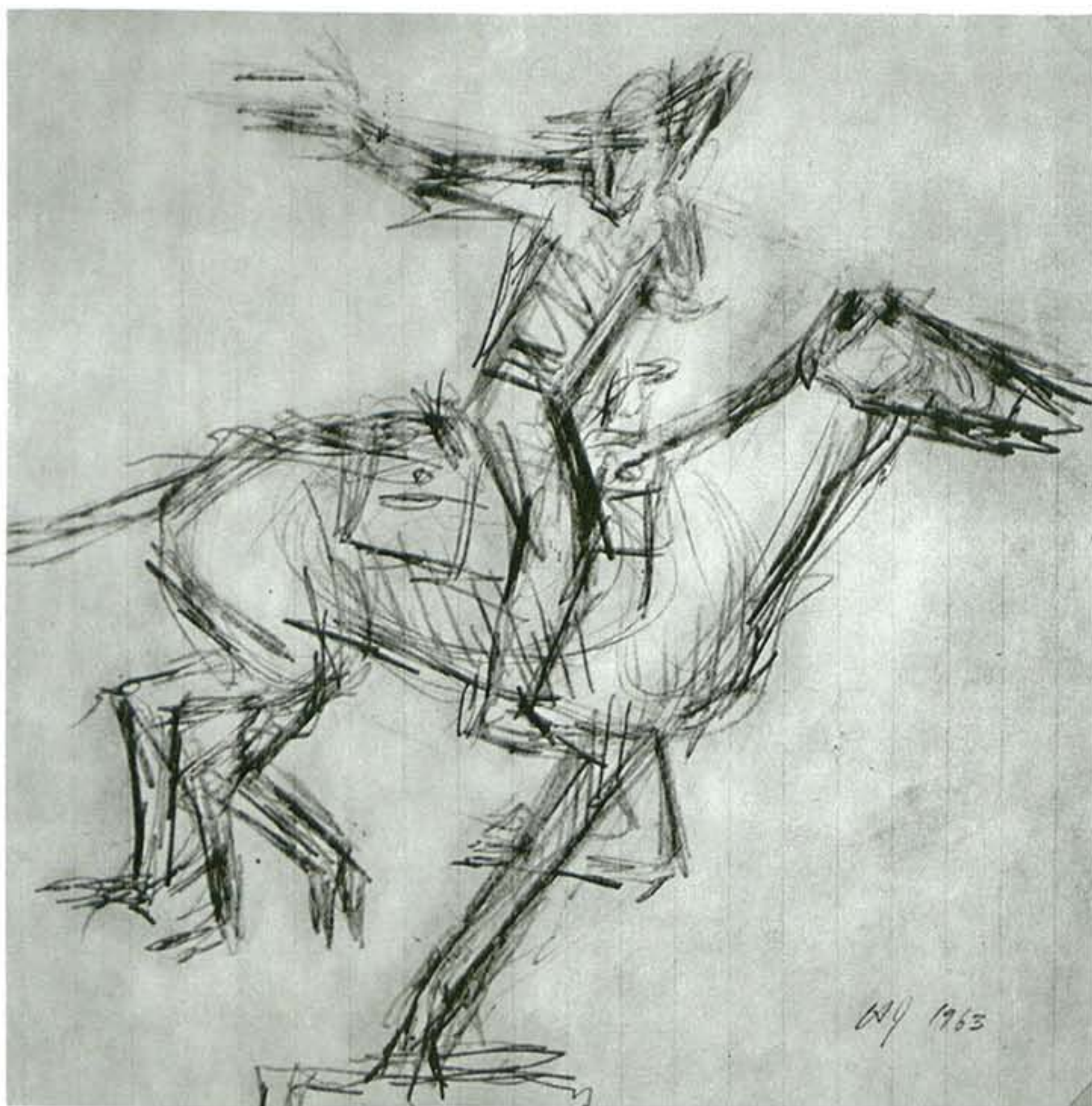
ENTERING FROM THE CENTER

River, Road and Point involved Jackson as never before in the total enterprise of art. In the studio it meant mobilizing not only his own skills around the central concept, but also those of carpenters, foundrymen, painters, mechanics, and other technical assistants. Outside the studio it called on every resource of persuasion and ingenuity he could muster to deal with the museum board's collective insecurities and to protect the integrity of his work. He became involved in the whole range of conceptual, technical, political, and economic factors that support the existence and propagation of art, factors that have slipped beyond the control of artists in the twentieth century, who no longer have access to a built-in system of patronage.

Jackson's answer to this disenfranchisement was, characteristically, to take matters in his own hands, with the constantly beleaguered belief that his aesthetic vision would somehow give birth to the means for communicating it. His return to figurative work and the history of the two large commissions established his willingness to break with the status quo. The creation of his private foundry in 1964 furthered his efforts toward independence. His bronzes, produced in editions of up to forty and sold primarily by Rudy Wunderlich of the Kennedy Galleries in New York, were reaching an ever-widening audience, enabling him constantly to expand the scope of his work. By 1967, he had begun to develop the resources and mechanism for dealing with every aspect of artistic production and was thinking increasingly in terms of "a form that was more generally available and comprehensible to a larger audience and more truly universal."

Pony Express appeared in patinated and painted versions in 1967 (pls. 301–304), at the height of Jackson's involvement in *River, Road and Point*. It had been gestating since 1962 when Stacy Burke, the daughter of Jackson's friend and first employer in Cody, called to ask if he would do something on the subject for a contemplated monument in California. That night Jackson made two spontaneous impressionistic studies at his Broome Street studio, one of which was cast in 1963 (pls. 305–306). Although the commission was awarded to another sculptor, he took up the subject again in 1964, producing an intense, "hard-bitten" head study (cast in 1965, pls. 307–308). Then, in 1966–67, he slowly and painstakingly modeled the final version, using Ivo Ricci and another studio assistant at Camaiore as models for the rider, and his brown mare Gina for the horse.

Pony Express evolved alongside the *Range Burial*, *Stampede*, and the Pittsburgh murals, drawing on the accumulated knowledge and intense interaction between painting and sculpture that characterized this period—the merging of the *Stampede* sculpture into the larger context of the painting and the emergence of more monumental figures out of *River, Road and Point*. The fusion that takes place in both painted and unpainted versions of *Pony Express* cannot be described simply as a joining of color and volume. There is no doubt that the image is three-dimensional, and yet it also operates as though it were part of a painting. From whatever angle it is viewed, the three-dimensional reality is also perceived as a two-dimensional plane. It might be objected that this is true of any sculpture



149. *Study for Pony Express*. 1963. Pencil on lined yellow paper, 8 x 8". Collection of the artist

(including Jackson's early work) or any object. But there are important differences.

In *Pony Express* each view represents a different plane within which the total configuration is composed as a drawing or painting might be. The whole form becomes an infinite cross section of images, each complete in itself and yet inseparable

from the total form. Each shift around the figure reveals a new set of relationships within it, as though that single moment, held in balance between the forward flight of the horse and the backward thrust of the rider to confront his pursuers, was being played out like a film in an endless progression of pictures. From one point of view, for



150. *Study for Pony Express*. 1966. Pencil on paper, 34 x 24½". Collection of the artist

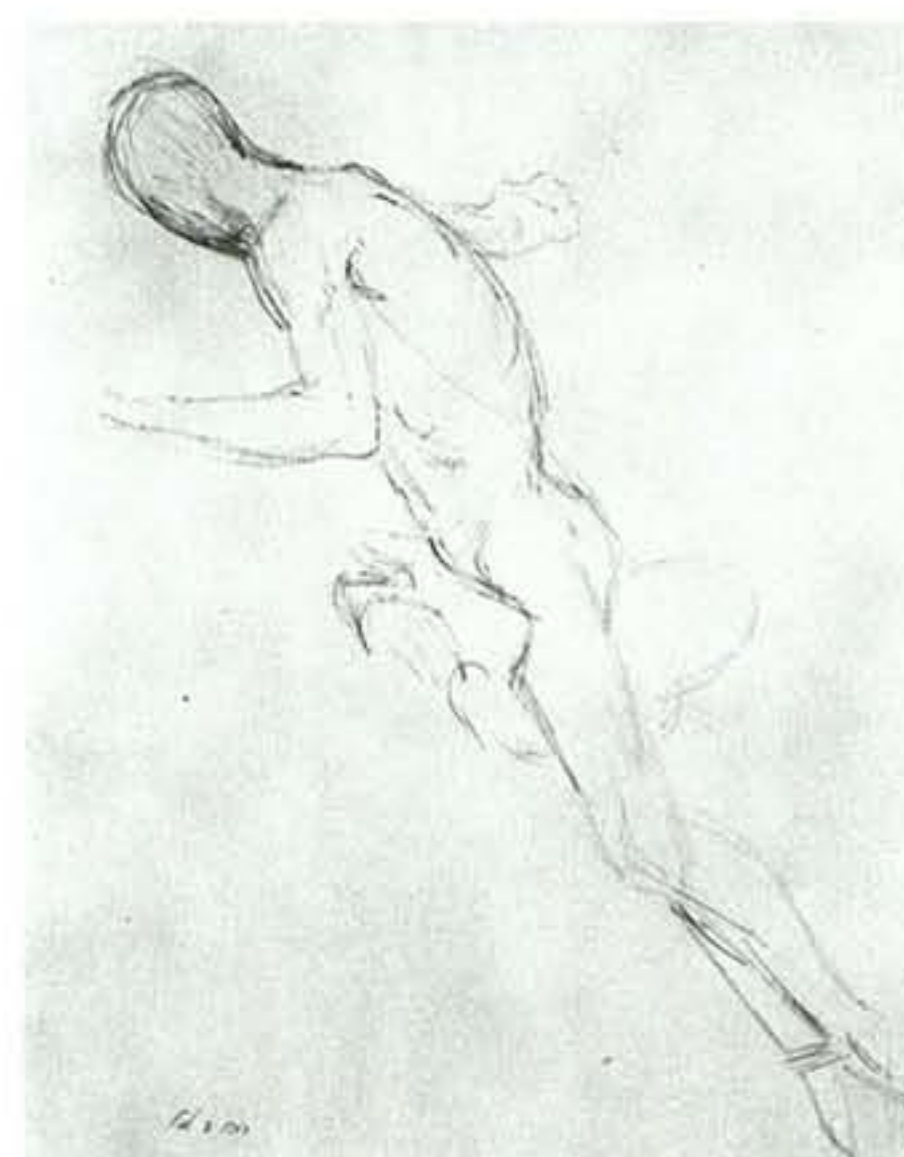
151. Wax model of *Pony Express, First Study*. 1963. 10 x 13 x 7"

instance, the windblown hat brim swoops upward, completing the arc of the arm and gun; in another it completes a circle described by the horse's head and rump. Every detail is in conformity with the whole but in a constantly changing order. Each of these compositions is an interlocking of arcs and diagonals contained within an overall configuration of circles within circles.

Pony Express is Jackson's first absolute statement of form in terms of joining painting and sculpture, abstraction and realism. It represents a conscious refinement of his earlier work. The longer, more fluid lines of works such as *Bronc Stomper* (pls. 206–207), *First Saddle* (pls. 219–20), and *Hazin' in the Leaders* (pl. 259), which it closely resembles, have been tightened into a compact structure that seems to simultaneously explode from the center and contract from the perimeter of the outermost circle. Abstract design focuses in the physical and dramatic presence of the horse and rider the vast, perilous landscape and the entire frontier era, coordinates of both real and legendary space and time.

In this work abstraction and realism are synonymous. Sketches have charm and evocative power, but they fall short, as Delacroix thought, of taking the risk to complete the concept in every respect, relying on a certain confidence that the central idea will not be lost in the process. Jackson was at last sure enough of his vision to penetrate more deeply into the form and substance of the solitary, hell-bent Pony Express rider, the historical and physical image. All the procedures he had developed in connection with the great commissions were now internalized in a single figure.

The basic concept of the work was established in the rough sketch of 1963 and changed very little. But the raw power and freedom of the initial version had yet to be channeled into a coherent and complete image. The process involved careful historical and anatomical research, disciplines that had become essential in the work on *River, Road and Point*. Exact documentation of the kind of clothing, equipment, and horses used during the brief eighteen-month history of the Pony Express Service brought the figures into historical focus. (Jackson deviated in at least one detail by giving the rider a large .44 caliber 1851 Navy Colt pistol rather than a smaller, lighter-caliber gun called for in the official manual, reasoning that any experienced rider would carry the weapon he was comfortable with rather than follow the rules literally.) Sketches for *Pony Express* included extensive studies from living



152-53. Studies for *Pony Express*. Feb. 2, 1967. Pencil on paper, 10 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 13 $\frac{1}{2}$ ". Collection of the artist

155-56. Studies for *Pony Express*. Feb. 1-2, 1967. Pencil on paper, 10 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 13 $\frac{1}{2}$ ". Collection of the artist



154. *Anatomical Head Study*. 1966. Patinaed bronze, 9 x 8 x 5 $\frac{1}{2}$ "

models, whereas in earlier sculptures Jackson had relied primarily on his instinctive feeling for form and movement tutored by years of observation and drawing. His approach, as in the Pittsburgh murals, had become more scientific and considered, but the complex abstract structure and larger movements of the work are retained. The underlying musculature and details of dress and gear become an inherent part of the organic structure. Incidents on the surface—textures, shapes, and contours—seem to erupt from within, like extrusions of a landscape, and flow into the spiraling unity of the composition. For Jackson this detailing was another step in fulfilling the total vision. "If you look at accuracy as taking its place in universal order, then you communicate universal order. If your detail is simply passing from one point to another on the surface, you're hopelessly and forever lost. You sneeze and all of that kind of detail will change or blow away. If I concentrate on what's deeper than the surface, I discover the detail of what's on the surface from inside out. You don't comprehend a body by studying the comparative

geography from the outside. Come at it from its center and you can only enter its center by entering your own center."

Narrative action is also at the center of *Pony Express*. From any single view the impact of what is happening is immediate. Even a detail, such as the horse's frightened eye, conveys the story in some important way. Every view amplifies the narration, like the verses of a cowboy ballad—how the hat brim pushes back and the coattail flaps in the wind, the horse's mouth strains at the bit, the knees crook and pantslegs crease as they tighten against the saddle, the horse floats on one foreleg, the grim visage of the rider squints down the barrel of the gun, the arm snaps out in a taut arc as the hand squeezes off a shot.

In *Pony Express* the anonymous courage and heroism of Jackson's earlier figures are made both more specific and more universal. The image is immediately recognizable as the symbol of an epoch in American history, the first of several such heroic figures that dominate Jackson's later work, including *The Marshal* (1969-70), *Two Champs* (1974),

Sacagawea (1977-80), and *Chief Washakie* (1978). These works were also to find an entirely new and far broader audience.

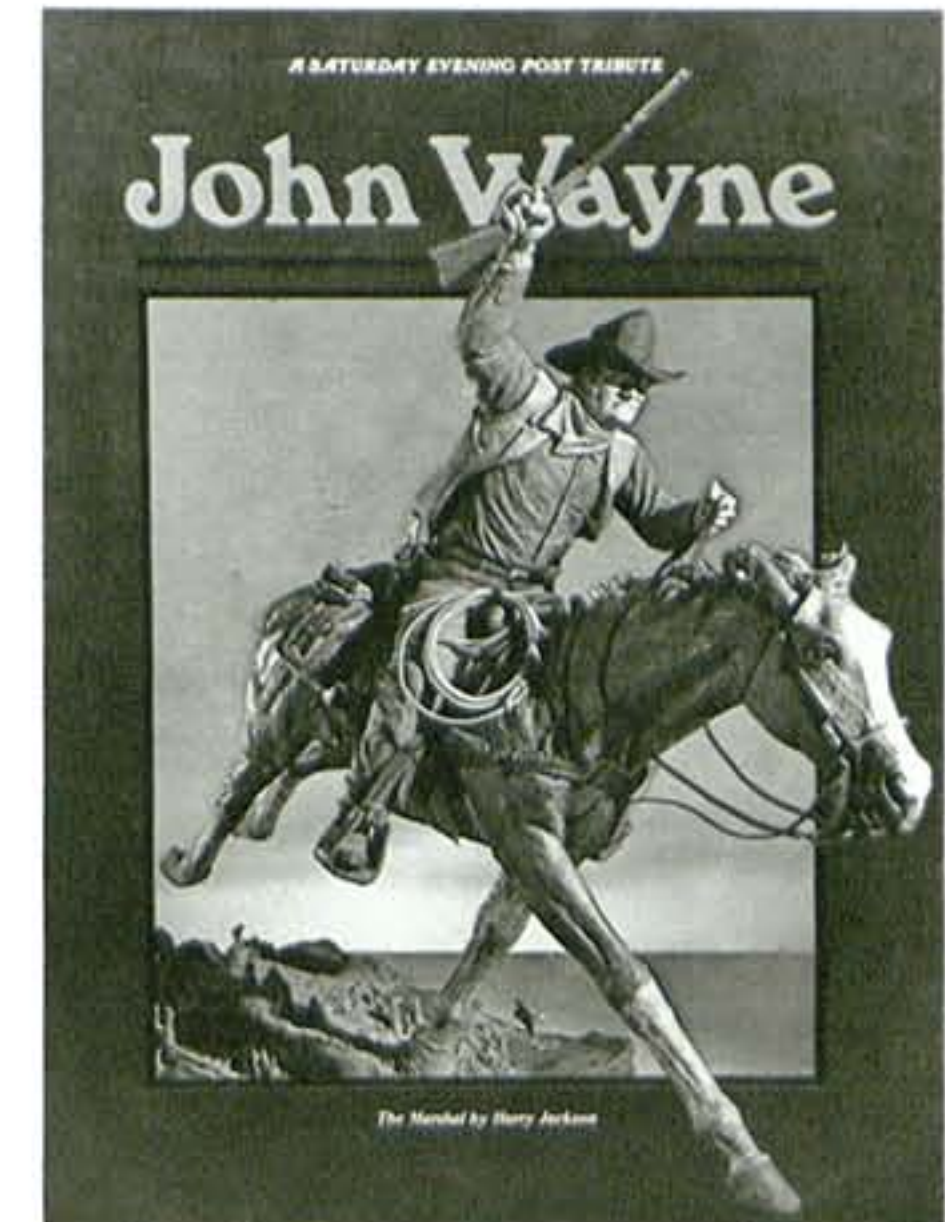
While reaching out to a larger audience, Jackson also broke with the traditional and exclusive system of art dealing. With the establishment of his foundry in 1964, he had already taken control of production. In 1968 he began to take charge of the financial and marketing side of his operations by incorporating Wyoming Foundry Studios in Europe as the sole representative for his work. With the mounting success of Jackson's bronzes, particularly after the appearance of *Pony Express*, it became clear why the break, unorthodox as it was, had to be made. By 1968 one gallery alone owed the artist a quarter of a million dollars for art previously sold. It is a common practice among dealers not to report sales or forward monies owed to the artists until an additional casting is needed in the marketplace, at which time the gallery has to disclose its prior sales in order to request the new casting. In effect, the gallery operates with the artist's capital, as well as his art.



157. Jackson works on John Wayne/Rooster Cogburn portrait for *TIME* magazine cover, with Forrest Davidson posing. July 1969



158. *TIME* magazine cover of Aug. 8, 1969, with Jackson's portrayal of John Wayne as Rooster Cogburn



159. Cover of special *Saturday Evening Post* tribute to John Wayne with Jackson's *The Marshal*. July–Aug. 1979

Besides this, the artist finds himself helpless to control the distribution of his own work. He may be unable to recover pieces on consignment without tedious and costly legal action. Nor can he stop the gallery from holding his work until all other castings of the edition have been sold, only later to release the bronzes, legally owned by the artist, at a price that undercuts the established market price. In addition, the gallery effectively cuts the artist off from the people he is trying to address by not volunteering the names of new collectors.

Jackson continued to show with various galleries until he was able to take total command of his relationships with dealers in the late 1970s, but he was increasingly the master of his own financial fate. "The artist is the creative center of his work," he argued. "It is he who should have complete control over his work."

From its single-handed beginnings in 1968, the Wyoming Foundry Studios corporation has grown to employ more than thirty master artisans and

apprentices at the Camaiole foundry, and an administrative, marketing, and restoration staff of twenty in Cody, Wyoming (where WFS also incorporated in 1970), and in New York. The number of collectors of Jackson's work has increased to more than three thousand and total sales to well over four million dollars annually. The success of the operation and production needs of the foundry led Jackson to fund in 1973 a six-year apprentice program through his Western Fine Arts Foundation. Under foundation grants young Americans are brought to Camaiole to learn all phases of lost-wax bronze casting with the aim not only of preserving and furthering the craft but also of establishing it on a higher level in the United States.

In this period of taking control, from 1967 to 1969, Jackson continued to work on *River, Road and Point* and to produce bronzes derived from that as well as the Coe commission and the *Pony Express*. In 1968 he was commissioned by the city of Valdivia, Chile, to create a monumental portrait bust

of Admiral Lord Cochrane (pls. 311–13), the early nineteenth-century British maritime hero of Chile in the wars of independence against Spain. Jackson was recommended by the admiral's great-grandson Douglas Cochrane, who also posed for the work in Italy. Cast in 1969, the bust was dedicated in a public ceremony in Valdivia in 1970. The Cochrane bust was Jackson's first public monument to fully take advantage of the conditions and scale of an outdoor setting. The proudly raised head, windblown hair, large scale (one-and-a-half times lifesize), and massive form contribute to an image that is literally monumental and heroic. All these attributes were to play an important role in Jackson's later work.

In July of 1969 *TIME* magazine asked Jackson to create a three-dimensional polychrome model of John Wayne as Rooster Cogburn in the Western movie *True Grit* for the cover of their August 8 issue (pl. 158). "I was skeptical about doing him as Rooster Cogburn," he later told writer Jerry McGuire, "but *True Grit* had just opened at Radio

City Music Hall in New York and I went to see it. I was so relieved to see Wayne playing himself—an over-middle-aged man who drinks a bit. I knew I could do him. I selected the scene where all the odds are against him, and he just shouts, 'Fill your hand, you sonofabitch!' and rides hell-bent across the meadow into the middle of the bad guys."

On his arrival in New York, Jackson found he had only six days to complete the commission. Setting up in his Broome Street studio for the last time, he enlisted his limousine driver, a black man named Forrest Davidson, whose physique came closest to that of John Wayne, to pose for the study (pl. 157). For six days and nights he worked practically non-stop modeling the figures in wax and finally painting them with the assistance of Paolo Hauri, his color expert from the studio in Camaiole. Because the threat of an epileptic seizure increases with fatigue, Dr. Adrian Zornotti, a long-time friend and collector, volunteered to stay with him. The work was completed on schedule,



160. Harry Jackson and John Wayne with *The Marshal* during filming of *Harry Jackson—A Man and His Art* in Durango, Mex. 1971

and Harry returned to Europe to greet his new daughter Molly, born on September 1. The cover received an award as the best of 1969, John Wayne won an Oscar for his performance in *True Grit*, and the actor and sculptor became close friends.

The *TIME* study also served as the model for *The Marshal* (pls. 314–17), which, with *Pony Express*, was to become the most widely disseminated of Jackson's bronzes. For eight months following his return to Italy in September 1969 he remodeled and refined the work, making a number of versions that included one in colored wax. Like *Pony Express*, the cast version of *The Marshal* achieves a structural and cinematic unity that has its origin in the less fully realized form of an earlier work, in this case the 1959 bronze *Ropin'* (pl. 221). The composition is based on intersecting diagonals and triangular shapes, dominated by an X-shape that ties horse and man together, rather than counterpoised movements within a circle as in *Pony Express*.

As an abstraction the configuration is less pure

than that of the finely balanced *Pony Express*, just as the character himself, past his prime, oversized, blind in one eye, is a collection of impurities mobilized into action—a courage-crazy old man. The massive figure clatters with imperfections, making his own terrible noise in the world, and yet is somehow absorbed into graceful and purposeful movement. Human strength and vulnerability merge in an abstract image that is yet more detailed and real than ever before. The portrayal of Wayne/Cogburn in *The Marshal* is an homage to the cowboy as a cultural hero, an image that draws on the universal appeal of a distinctly American genre—the Western—and the man most closely identified with it. The image is popular in a way that had never occurred before in Jackson's work, and therefore "more comprehensible to a larger audience." Another level of meaning, linked with a broad cultural consciousness, was added to Jackson's celebration of "those men, young and old, who had chosen to be cowboys and to live by the code that being a cowboy implied."

Jackson also began to spend more time in Wyoming, gradually expanding his interests there. Realizing he couldn't create a large studio and home at the Pitchfork, he moved in 1970 to Lost Cabin, Wyoming, with his old cowboy friend Hugh Mal-



161. Left to right: Saddle bronc rider Bill Stanton, world champion bull rider Freckles Brown, Harry Jackson, and sculptor Jacques Lipchitz at the Rodeo Far West, Livorno, Italy. 1970

ler from Meeteetse, who had leased part of the half-million acre Spratt Cattle Company. There Jackson bought three houses, including "the only virgin railroad station in America," created by land baron J. B. Oakie in anticipation of a railroad that never came, and leased a large two-story brick building that had been the ranch commissary as his studio. This remained Jackson's second home until 1979, when all his Wyoming interests were consolidated in Cody.

The increasing pace of Jackson's activities on both sides of the Atlantic took its toll on his marriage to Sarah, from whom he was legally separated in 1970 and divorced in 1971. Bitter disappointment hurtled him more deeply into his work. His

bronzes included *Trapper*, 1970 (pls. 284–87); *Algonquin Chief and Warrior*, 1971 (pls. 290–91); and heads related to the latter (pls. 292–98), which completed the cycle of small but monumental figures from *River, Road and Point*. The entire group of works was gathered into a one-man exhibition at the Fort Pitt Museum in Pittsburgh in 1971. But much of Jackson's time went into non-art projects, and no new work was begun.

He wrote his book on lost-wax bronze casting, the only complete treatment of the subject, which was published in 1972. A one-hour film on his life and work, narrated by John Wayne, also appeared that year. It seemed to be a period of waiting and summing up, but in 1973 a new cycle would begin.



162. Left to right: Jim Golhring on Ponder, Ash Whitt on Mouse, Hugh Whitt on Crow, Harry Jackson on Corndog, Bert Avery on Weasel, and Slim Whitt on Spider at Lost Cabin, Wyo. Oct. 1976