



Jackson Pollock: An American Saga

By Gregory Smith Steven Naifeh

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Jackson Pollock was more than a great artist, he was a creative force of nature. He changed not only the course of Western art, but our very definition of "art." He was the quintessential tortured genius, an American Vincent van Gogh, cut from the same unconforming cloth as his contemporaries Ernest Hemingway and James Dean--and tormented by the same demons; a "cowboy artist" who rose from obscurity to take his place among the titans of modern art, and whose paintings now command millions of dollars.

Here, for the first time, is the life behind that extraordinary achievement--the disjointed childhood, the sibling rivalry, the sexual ambiguity, and the artistic frustration out of which both artist and art developed.

Based on more than 2,000 interviews with 850 people, Jackson Pollock is the first book to explore the life of a great artist with the psychological depth that marks the best biographies of literary and political figures. In eight years of research the authors have uncovered previously unknown letters and documents, gained access to medical and psychiatric records, and interviewed scores of the artist's friends and acquaintances whose stories had never been told. They were also the first biographers in twenty years to benefit from the cooperation of Pollock's widow, Lee Krasner.

The results of these unprecedented efforts lie before you: a rich, sprawling, landmark biography of one of the most compelling figures in all of American culture; a brilliant, explosive "portrait of the artist," intimately detailed, abundantly illustrated (with more than 200 photographs from Pollock's life and work, many of them never before published), and filled with new information and new insights.

In a style as richly textured, engrossing, and poignant as the best of contemporary literature, Steven Naifeh and Gregory White Smith give us the family crucible out of which the artist and his art emerged. Beginning with Jackson's birth on a sheep ranch in Wyoming, we follow the Pollock family on a relentless trek across the American West, as their dreams of a better life somewhere else are repeatedly frustrated. We see the young Jack Pollock as a struggling art student in New York, escaping into drunken rages or throwing himself into the Hudson River in one of several attempts at suicide.

Later, we see Pollock, by turns, gently affectionate and outrageously cruel, creatively bankrupt and heroically productive. We see him alternately fascinated and intimidated by his contemporaries: Clement Greenberg, Franz Kline, Willem de Kooning, Robert Motherwell, Barnett Newman, Harold Rosenberg, Clyfford Still, Tennessee Williams. We see him enter into a tumultuous marriage with the painter Lee Krasner, creating a powerful alliance that will lead first to triumph, then to decline, and finally to death when, with his mistress at his side, Pollock smashes his car into a tree.

But Jackson Pollock is more than the epic story of a tormented man and his sublime art, it is also a compulsively readable, sweeping saga of America's cultural coming of age. From frontier Iowa to the dust bowl of Arizona, from the twilight of the Wild West to the desolation of Depression-era New York, from the excitement and experimentation of the Mexican muralists to the fanfare of the Surrealists' visit to America, from the arts projects of the WPA to the explosion of interest and money that marked the beginning of the modern art world, Pollock's story unfolds against the dramatic landscape of American history.

Here then is a definitive record of the journey of an artist, filled with piercing psychological insights, that brings us to a truer understanding of the power and pathos of creative genius.

"Monumental and impressive."

—*Washington Post*

"For once, with this intense, engrossing, and indeed brilliant work, we have a biography that justifies its length. Seldom have the history of an artist

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