



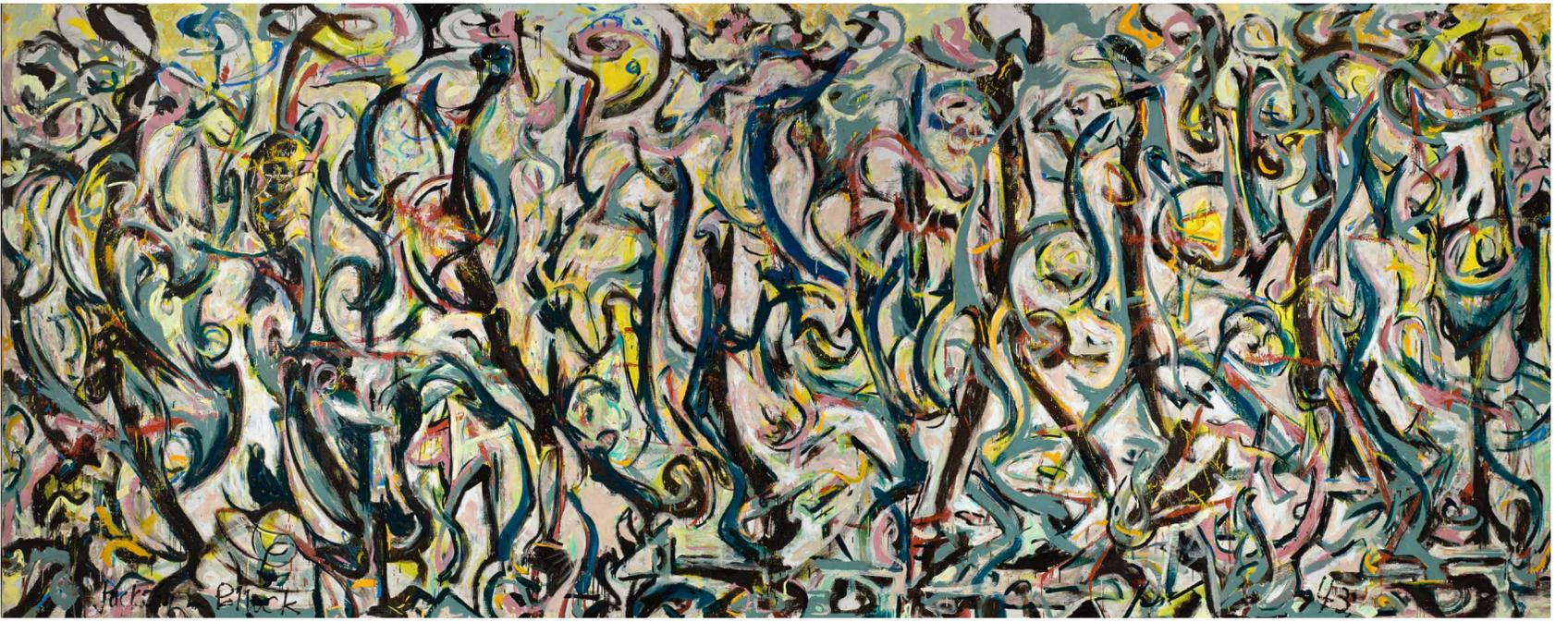
Jackson Pollock with the unpainted canvas for *Mural* in his and Lee Krasner's Eighth Street apartment, New York, summer 1943. Photo: Bernard Schardt, courtesy Pollock-Krasner House and Study Center, East Hampton, New York, Gift of Jeffrey Potter

Pollock's Vision

Peggy Guggenheim commissioned a monumental painting from Jackson Pollock in the summer of 1943. It was destined for the entrance hall of the Manhattan town house in which she rented an apartment upstairs. The artist Marcel Duchamp suggested Pollock use canvas for the project, rather than paint directly on the wall, thus ensuring that the work would be movable. Pollock wrote of the commission that there were “no strings as to what or how I paint it,” continuing, “I am going to paint it in oil on canvas. . . . I've had to tear out the partition between the front and middle room [of my apartment] to get the damned thing up. I have it stretched now. It looks pretty big, but exciting as all hell.”

For several decades, it was said that Pollock executed *Mural* in one feverish night, and a friend later paraphrased the artist's account of his “vision”: “It was a stampede . . . every animal in the American West . . . cows and horses and antelopes and buffaloes. Everything is charging across that goddamn surface.” The Western landscape of Pollock's childhood may have informed the expanse and uninhibited rhythm of *Mural*. Pollock was certainly influenced in his significant undertaking by the work of the Mexican muralists José Clemente Orozco, Diego Rivera, and David Alfaro Siqueiros; Pablo Picasso, whose *Guernica* (1937) was on extended view in New York; and his teacher Thomas Hart Benton; among others.

This story of *Mural*'s spontaneous creation, however, is a legend. Recent technical study and treatment at the Getty Conservation Institute and the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles confirmed that while Pollock produced the primary layers in wet-on-wet paint—possibly during his initial burst of activity—he developed the composition over several days, if not weeks, adding fresh paint over layers that had dried completely. Scientists also identified more than twenty-five oil colors and paint mixtures in *Mural*, applied not only as controlled brushstrokes and dabs but also splatters and smears. Ultimately, any vestiges of figuration among the layered imagery and calligraphic markings gave way to the freedom of gestural abstraction.



Jackson Pollock

b. 1912, Cody, Wyoming

d. 1956, Springs, New York

Mural

1943

Oil and casein on canvas

University of Iowa Stanley Museum of Art,

Gift of Peggy Guggenheim, 1959.6



Jackson Pollock

b. 1912, Cody, Wyoming

d. 1956, Springs, New York

The She-Wolf

1943

Oil, gouache, and plaster on canvas

The Museum of Modern Art, New York,
Purchase, 1944

The She-Wolf was exhibited in Pollock's first solo exhibition, which Peggy Guggenheim presented at her revolutionary Art of This Century museum-gallery in November 1943. The artist asserted the following year that "*She-Wolf* came into existence because I had to paint it. Any attempt on my part to say something about it, to attempt explanation on the inexplicable, could only destroy it." Nonetheless, mythological imagery was prevalent in Pollock's work, and he may have been inspired by the creation story of Rome, wherein a wolf suckled the city's twin founders, Romulus and Remus. *The She-Wolf* became the first Pollock to be acquired by a museum.



Jackson Pollock

b. 1912, Cody, Wyoming

d. 1956, Springs, New York

Untitled (Green Silver)

ca. 1949

Alkyd enamel, oil, and aluminum paint on board
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York,
Gift, Sylvia and Joseph Slifka 2004.63

In the aftermath of World War II, Pollock and others grappled with a heightened awareness of humankind's vulnerabilities and expressed shared anxieties through bold new art forms. To produce his groundbreaking abstractions, made between late 1947 and 1950, Pollock worked in a bodily yet controlled manner from above the picture plane, dripping and pouring paint onto canvases and papers. As his alternative methods and radical all-over style—arguably developed in dialogue with his partner, artist Lee Krasner—took hold, the editors of *Life* magazine were emboldened to ask in a 1949 feature, “Is He the Greatest Living Painter in the United States?”



Jackson Pollock

b. 1912, Cody, Wyoming

d. 1956, Springs, New York

Ocean Greyness

1953

Oil on canvas

Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York

54.1408

One of Pollock's late works, *Ocean Greyness* reveals the dynamic tension between representation and abstraction at the core of his oeuvre. After pouring and dripping paint from 1947 to 1950, he generally returned to applying it more conventionally by brush on stretched canvas, as he had done a decade prior. Pollock also reintroduced more recognizable iconography, such as this churning sea of colored fragments with disembodied eyelike forms at their center. "When you are painting out of your unconscious," the artist claimed, "figures are bound to emerge."