

JACKSON POLLOCK'S LIFE SEEMS MADE FOR A MOVIE--HERE IT COMES

INGRID SISCHY: So how did you end up directing and starring in a movie about the life of Jackson Pollock? It's the first film you
5directed. Were you always interested in his paintings?

ED HARRIS: I really knew little about Pollock until 1986 when my dad, who was working in the bookstore at the Chicago Art Institute, sent
10me a book for my birthday, Jeffrey Potter's *To A Violent Grave* [1985], an oral biography of Pollock. What struck me initially was the picture of Pollock on the cover: It was just a
15headshot, but there was definitely a certain physical resemblance to myself. Anyway, I read that book and found it to be pretty
interesting. Then my father sent me another book, this one *Jackson Pollock: A Biography*
[1987], by Deborah Solomon. His inscription
20was something like "I hate to keep bugging you about this but I think there's a film in here somewhere for you." Not too long after that, the best man at my father's wedding was
George Naifeh, the father of Steven Naifeh. At
25the time, Steven Naifeh and Gregory White Smith were working on *Jackson Pollock: An American Saga* [1989], their Pollock book, the one that eventually won the Pulitzer Prize--the
book we ultimately bought the rights to. They
30ended up sending me the galleys before it was published.

IS: So, you've been working on this film for more than ten years?

EH: Yeah, I kind of lost track of time. I spent
35so much time thinking about it and working on it that it really became part of my life.

IS: Have you asked your father what it was that made him tune into Pollock for you? Was
it something that went beyond the fact that
40there's a remarkable physical resemblance between the two of you?

EH: I keep meaning to ask him that and I haven't. You should call him and ask him.
[both laugh]

45IS: Can you remember how you reacted the first time you saw a painting by Pollock?

EH: I guess when I first saw his art I wasn't sure what to think of it. It was probably in the late '80s; I might've seen something before, but
50I wouldn't have been aware of what I was looking at. Over the years I've grown to have a

very deep appreciation of Pollock's paintings. It's very difficult for me to talk about it, though. He didn't really like talking about his
55work too much, either. It's one of the things I like about him.

IS: He lived in a time when artists were supposed to either leave the talking to the critics, or let the work, quotes, speak for itself.
60I have mixed feelings about all of that. Anyway, did you ever have art ambitions?

EH: I used to draw, but I'd never really painted.

IS: Until the movie, that is. I know it mattered
65to you that you had an authentic grasp of what he did as an artist. How did you get to that?

EH: I started fooling around in the early 90's, exploring Pollock's basic technique.

IS: How?

70EH: I had some house paint and sticks and some boards, and just began to dunk the stick in the paint, and started dripping it and spattering it off the stick to see what the effect would be, getting familiar with the physicality
75of it. It really helped me to realize how intentional his work was.

IS: So in the film, when the audience sees you in the act of painting, it's true--you are. But when we see actual paintings, they're copies,
80right?

EH: Yeah, reproductions, painted with the Pollock estate's permission. They blessed us with the rights to the images. And we had to get the blessings of the people who own the
85paintings, too.

IS: It must have been quite a challenge to paint the reproductions, so they had some aura, as well as technical accuracy.

EH: Most of the pre-drip Pollock works were
90painted by an artist named Lisa Lawley. We weren't really sure how to recreate the drip paintings--and do them well. But one of the production designers suggested bringing together some of the best scenic artists in the
95country and letting them try it.

I'll never forget walking into the New York State Armory in Brooklyn where we shot some of the film and where they were building the set, and these artists were in the corner of this huge space. They each had their little eight by ten reproductions of Pollock's works--even if the original was 16 feet long--and they were, line by line, dipping their sticks in the paint, and recreating those paintings. It blew me away. Obviously, the reproductions don't have the same impulse or urgency as the originals, because they were methodically reproduced. But in terms of cinema, I think they really work. Pollock's paintings were like his friends. They were always around him, unless they were being shown. I wanted to have them around on the set, too.

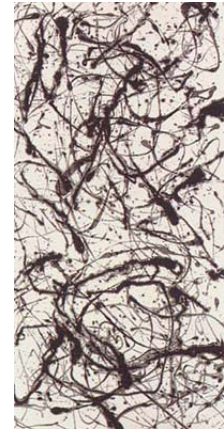
IS: Your film implicitly suggests something fascinating about the media and art back then. In fact, it is the media that provides a big emotional turning point in your movie. I'm referring to the part where a documentary is being made about Pollock and he freaks. He feels that he's sold himself out and that he's turned into a phony, painting for the camera, and answering questions that make him feel

like he's a creature from outer space. People like Pollock, de Kooning, Krasner, Rothko, Kline, the American Abstract Expressionists were separate from mass media, separate from commerce. There was a romance about them. They were in their own world, a world in which they were dedicated to doing art which hardly anyone in the outside world understood or wanted.

EH: They were essentially working in a vacuum, these guys. But there was a real camaraderie among them, knowing that they were pursuing something nobody gave a damn about, and yet they had this need to continue doing it. And then of course, there was nothing like a little bit of fame to fuck it up. In Pollock's case, he was creating art that's not a derivative of anything, that's really his own mode of expression, that's very new, a breakthrough kind of deal. That fascinated me because I don't have that opportunity in my particular field of artistic endeavor.

145 [Interview, Dec, 2000](#) by [Ingrid Sischy](#)
COPYRIGHT 2000 Brant Publications, Inc.

Jackson Pollock's Life Seems Made for a Movie – Here it Comes



150

General statements

What kind of text is this?
When and where was it published?

155

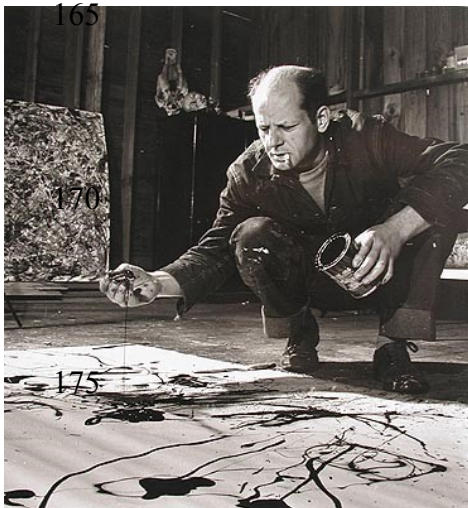
Part 1 (l. 1-59)

1. Vocabulary :

Réaliser un film – jouer un rôle – frapper (figuré) – portrait – insister – citations.

2. Comprehension

a. True or False (justify by quoting from the text)



- 1) Ed Harris is a painter.
- 2) The interview is about a new biography about Pollock's life.
- 3) Ed Harris has always been interested in Pollock's paintings
- 4) Ed Harris's father introduced him to the painter.
- 5) Ed Harris directed the film in less than a year.

b. Questions

- When did EH first hear about Pollock?
- What motivated him to direct a film about the life of JP?
- How was he introduced to the artist's work?
- What was EH first reaction when he saw a painting by Pollock?
- What does he appreciate about this artist?

180

Part 2 (l. 60-110)

1. How did EH explore Pollock's basic technique? Why was it important for the film?
2. fill in the table to explain the strategies used in the film in order to be faithful (fidèle) to the artists' painting technique

| Painting tools | Painting techniques | Strategies adopted for the film |
|----------------|---------------------|---------------------------------|
| | | |

185 **Part 3 (l. 112-141)**

1. Vocabulary

Moment clé - Piquer une crise – imposteur – se livrer à – renommée – percée- effort artistique

190 Find two expressions showing that EH's manner of speech is colloquial (slang)

2. What did the film suggest about the relation between the artist and the media?
3. What artistic trend was Pollock the flagship of? Name other artists.
4. What was special about these artists and their art?

195 5. What was so special about Pollock's paintings which fascinated EH?



Jackson Pollock, 1912 - 1956

Number 7, 1951, 1951

1.435 x 1.676 m (56 1/2 x 66 in.)

Enamel on canvas

National Gallery of Art