



Action Jackson

By Jan Greenberg, Sandra Jordan

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One late spring morning the American artist Jackson Pollock began work on the canvas that would ultimately come to be known as Number 1, 1950 (*Lavender Mist*).

Award-winning authors Jan Greenberg and Sandra Jordan use this moment as the departure point for a unique picture book about a great painter and the way in which he worked. Their lyrical text, drawn from Pollock's own comments and those made by members of his immediate circle, is perfectly complemented by vibrant watercolors by Robert Andrew Parker that honor his spirit of the artist without imitating his paintings.

A photographic reproduction of the finished painting, a short biography, a bibliography, and a detailed list of notes and sources that are fascinating reading in their own right make this an authoritative as well as beautiful book for readers of all ages.

Action Jackson is a Sibert Honor Book, a *New York Times* Best Book of the Year, and a *Publishers Weekly* Best Book of the Year.

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Action Jackson By Jan Greenberg, Sandra Jordan Bibliography

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Nicknamed "Action Jackson" for his kinetic style, abstract artist Jackson Pollack takes the spotlight in this outstanding picture book biography. Collaborators Greenberg and Jordan (Chuck Close: Up Close) frame their account around a significant period in Pollack's life in 1950, when he created Number 1, 1950 (also called *Lavender Mist*), one of his most famous paintings. Readers follow Pollack into his barn studio, watch over his shoulder as he lays the canvas on the floor and begins to work all the while learning about his early life and influences ("Like the Native American sand painters he saw as a boy out West, he moves around the canvas coaxing the paint into loops and curves"). Weaving in quotes from Pollack himself and such child-friendly details as the artist's pets (including a tame crow named *Caw Caw*), the authors craft an imaginative account grounded in solid research and enlivened with lyrical prose ("He swoops and leaps like a dancer, paint trailing from a brush that doesn't touch the canvas"). Parker (*To Fly*, reviewed below) suggests the artist's graceful motion with the barest of penstrokes; in one spread, Pollock's body curves across both pages as he paints. Whether capturing the intensity of the creative process and the artist's unique choreography or the spare vistas of sea and sky near the artist's Long Island home, Parker's impressionistic pen-and-watercolor illustrations pay homage to the painter's sweep of line and color ("energy and motion made visible," to quote Pollack). An extensive afterword offers notes and sources, as well as photos of Pollack at work and quotes from his friends and colleagues. Ages 6-10.

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From School Library Journal

Grade 1-8-Greenberg and Jordan offer another remarkable book as they capture a two-month period during which Jackson Pollock created Number 1, 1950, (*Lavender Mist*). Though only focusing on this one painting, the authors manage to include interesting and revealing details about Pollock's childhood influences, his pets, his studio, and his environment. The active tense of the text lends immediacy and liveliness to the subject, "an athlete with a paintbrush" who "swoops and leaps like a dancer." Quotes from Pollock himself reveal his distinctive artistic process. The thoughtfulness and care that went into his painting should effectively put to rest any of the "I could do that" skepticism his art sometimes evokes. The authors remark on the widely varying responses to Pollock's work, and make note of his seminal place in 20th-century American art. Parker's watercolor illustrations capture the spirit of the text: dynamic as Pollock dances/paints, more introspective as he sits on the beach, watching the gulls. This is an exemplary picture-book biography, with lyrical prose and appealing illustrations that capture the moods of its subject, plus fascinating biographical details, photographs, and source notes. The text is accessible enough for younger readers to appreciate if read aloud and lively enough to appeal to older readers, who just might be inspired to learn more about the artist.

Robin L. Gibson, Perry County District Library, New Lexington, OH

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Review

"Nicknamed "Action Jackson" for his kinetic style, abstract artist Jackson Pollack takes the spotlight in this outstanding picture book biography. Collaborators Greenberg and Jordan frame their account around a significant period in Pollack's life in 1950, when he created Number 1, 1950 (also called *Lavender Mist*), one of his most famous paintings. Readers follow Pollack into his barn studio, watch over his shoulder as he lays the canvas on the floor and begins to work all the while learning about his early life and influences ("Like the Native American sand painters he saw as a boy out West, he moves around the canvas coaxing the paint into

loops and curves"). Weaving in quotes from Pollack himself and such child-friendly details as the artist's pets (including a tame crow named Caw Caw), the authors craft an imaginative account grounded in solid research and enlivened with lyrical prose ("He swoops and leaps like a dancer, paint trailing from a brush that doesn't touch the canvas"). Parker (To Fly, reviewed below) suggests the artist's graceful motion with the barest of pen strokes; in one spread, Pollock's body curves across both pages as he paints. Whether capturing the intensity of the creative process and the artist's unique choreography or the spare vistas of sea and sky near the artist's Long Island home, Parker's impressionistic pen-and-watercolor illustrations pay homage to the painter's sweep of line and color ("energy and motion made visible," to quote Pollack). An extensive afterward offers notes and sources, as well as photos of Pollack at work and quotes from his friends and colleagues." *?Publishers Weekly Starred Review*

"Art history specialists Greenberg and Jordan (Boston Globe/Horn Book-winning Chuck Close, Up Close, 1998; Sibert Honor-winning Vincent Van Gogh: Portrait of An Artist, 2001) have again pushed the nonfiction envelope with this astonishing biography cum evocation of action painter and abstract expressionist icon Jackson Pollock. Dubbed "Action Jackson"-or sometimes even "Jack the Dripper"-by critics and admirers alike, Pollock is an acknowledged reference point for all late-20th-century painters. His influence has captivated the likes of illustrators Norman Rockwell and Ian Falconer and even actor-directors like Ed Harris. How to parse a painter like Pollock? In a stroke of expository genius, they focus on a semi-imagined account of an intense period in Pollock's life-May through June 1950. The brief frenzy of work that produced the transcendent and transformational painting "Number 1, 1950" known as "Lavender Mist." Greenberg and Jordan make strategic use of contemporaneous accounts and press sources including Hans Namuth's photos and documentary film. The book's back matter includes the terrifically interesting and surprisingly complete two pages of notes and sources. A perfect little biographical essay offers all the needed details including this poignant passage, a discreet but unsparing observation that: "Jackson struggled with alcoholism and depression for most of his adult life. When he was sober, he painted well, but when he was drinking he felt discouraged and temperamental." In tandem with this, it is hard to convey the equally astonishing strength of Parker's illustrations. A widely exhibited watercolorist of considerable renown (winner of Boston Globe/Horn Book Award for Cold Feet, 2000), Parker shows us both the mood sensibility of the painter he demonstrates the how of Pollock's technique. His semi-realistic and pleasingly spiky India ink drawings are heightened with expansive gloriously transparent watercolor washes in palette that often subtly reflect the colors and values of Pollock's "Lavender Mist." Parker evokes Pollock's painting with his own painter's hand. He masterfully conveys painting as an active dance of form and color. This stunning collaboration is both a tour de force and an uncommon pleasure." *?Kirkus reviews Starred Review*

"Action Jackson" was Jackson Pollock's nickname, and this slim, picture-book biography describes how this "athlete with a paintbrush" made one of his most famous works: the "drip painting" titled Lavender Mist. Using spare, lyrical words, the authors layer the exciting story with deep observations about what art is, how it is made, and why Pollock was so extraordinary. Descriptions of the thrilling creative process dance between long periods where Pollock "sits, silent, on the floor, staring at the blank canvas" and motion: "dripping, pouring, flinging." Throughout, the authors describe Pollock's technique differed from other artists, using plenty of sensory descriptions to place readers right in the studio. Parker's scribbly pen-and-watercolor illustrations get the mood just right; the loose lines have an improvised, energetic quality that echoes Pollock's painting. As in their previous collaborations, such as Chuck Close (1998) and Frank Gehry (2000), the authors explore what an artist really does in remarkably clear language that will encourage children to approach art, learn about it, and trust their own reactions. Pollock's darker struggles-alcoholism, depression-are mentioned in an excellent, appended two-page profile for older readers, which includes some thumbnail reproductions for Jackson's work. An authors' note addressing fictionalization, source notes, and a bibliography conclude." *?Booklist Starred Review*

"Greenberg and Jordan offer another remarkable book as they capture a two-month period during which

Jackson Pollock created Number 1, 1950, (Lavender Mist). Though only focusing on this one painting, the authors manage to include interesting and revealing details about Pollock's childhood influences: his pets, his studio, and his environment. The active tense of the text lends immediacy and liveliness to the subject, "an athlete with a paintbrush" who "swoops and leaps like a dancer." Quotes from Pollock himself reveal his distinctive artistic process. The thoughtfulness and care that went into his painting should effectively put to rest any of the "I could do that" skepticism his art sometimes evokes. The authors remark on the widely varying responses to Pollock's work, and make note of his seminal place in 20th-century American art. Parker's watercolor illustrations capture the spirit of the text: dynamic as Pollock dances/paints, more introspective as he sits on the beach, watching the gulls. This is an exemplary picture-book biography, with lyrical prose and appealing illustrations that capture the moods of its subject, plus fascinating biographical details, photographs, and source notes. The text is accessible enough for younger readers to appreciate if read aloud and lively enough to appeal to older readers, who just might be inspired to learn more about the artist." *School Library Journal Starred Review*

"The title may suggest a sports figure, but this book features a hero of a different sort: innovative painter Jackson Pollock. The ever-inventive Greenberg and Jordan have used their usual thorough research as the basis for a fiction-smoothed narrative of Pollock's days of painting at his Long Island home, focusing particularly on the production of the painting called Lavender Mist. Present tense makes the evocative you-are-there description of Pollock's routine ("He swoops and leaps like a dancer, paint trailing from a brush that doesn't touch the canvas") even more immediate, and the details of his non-painting activities ("He puts down the brush and goes into the house to help make supper") keep the portrait grounded in reality, reminding readers that an artist can be a guy with a dog and have a garden at the same time as being a controversial pioneer of the visual medium. Some biographical details enhance the text, but only insofar as they flesh out the explanation of this particular labor (a more detailed biography is included in the back matter); the result is a closely focused and insightful introduction to Pollock's way of making art. Parker's line-and-watercolor illustrations are surprisingly simpatico with their unusual subject: their reliance on uneven, unpolished, and yet oddly graceful line suits Pollock's driven drips, and their sparseness, which seems at odds with their subject's lush layerings, is well suited to conveying the open landscapes that inspired him. Abstract paintings in general can be pretty mysterious to kids, and this will provide them with context, especially in conjunction with a museum visit; it will also offer them some insight into that evanescent thing, an artist's vision. In addition to the biography, end matter includes detailed source notes that provide more illuminating details, a biography, and notes on the featured art." *Bulletin, Center for Children's Books*
Starred Review

"Picture books about artists are full of pitfalls. Will an illustrator attempt to re-create the style of a famous painter? Will he mix reproductions with illustrations, risking a cluttered design? Will the author make the subject more "accessible" by creating a child protagonist or a fictional child-friendly plot? In *Action Jackson*, the trio of collaborators nimbly avoids these hazards as they present the complex, reserved artist Jackson Pollock using a few words and large watercolor and pen illustrations. What Pollock paints is shown minimally with a few strokes, allowing the focus of these scenes to be the figure of the painter stretching his body across the canvas. Even when the artist is sitting quietly on the dunes, Parker's gestural style and quick improvisational line implies that Pollock's mind is as active as the gulls he's watching. Before beginning their story, the authors tell us in a short note that "some of this account is imagined." We also learn it is spring 1950 and Pollock is working on *Lavender Mist* (one of the first canvases in his new style). "In the afternoon Jackson Pollock puts on his paint-splattered boots and walks across the yard." We follow him to the old barn that serves as his studio and watch him start a new painting. "Some artists put a canvas on an easel or hang it on a wall. Not Jackson. He spreads his out like a sheet, smoothing it flat with his large hands. He wants his painting to be big, big as the sky out West where he grew up, flat as the marshland behind the house." Like an announcer providing play-by-play commentary, the text continues to track Pollock, using the artist's still periods staring at the canvas to impart bits of information about his materials and his reasons for using this

new technique. A grueling day at work is followed by days away from the studio to let the paint dry before continuing this cycle. Finally it is finished. We turn the page and see a reproduction of Number 1, 1950 (Lavender Mist)-startling departure after twenty pages of Parker's illustrations, but that's just the point. The text on this spread begins, "Some people will be shocked when they see what he has created." After waiting another week for the paint to dry (we see Pollock and his wife going about their lives), he can move the finished painting out of the way, and the book ends as it began, with Pollock staring as a new blank canvas covering the floor. On the last five pages the authors have provided additional biographical information and extensive notes, including photos of the artist as a child and at work in 1950. Greenberg, Jordan, and Parker have created a book with the energy and expression to match their subject." *The Horn Book Starred Review*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Jason Nunez:

Do you have favorite book? If you have, what is your favorite's book? Guide is very important thing for us to be aware of everything in the world. Each book has different aim as well as goal; it means that reserve has different type. Some people feel enjoy to spend their time and energy to read a book. These are reading whatever they get because their hobby is usually reading a book. What about the person who don't like studying a book? Sometime, person feel need book once they found difficult problem or even exercise. Well, probably you'll have this Action Jackson.

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