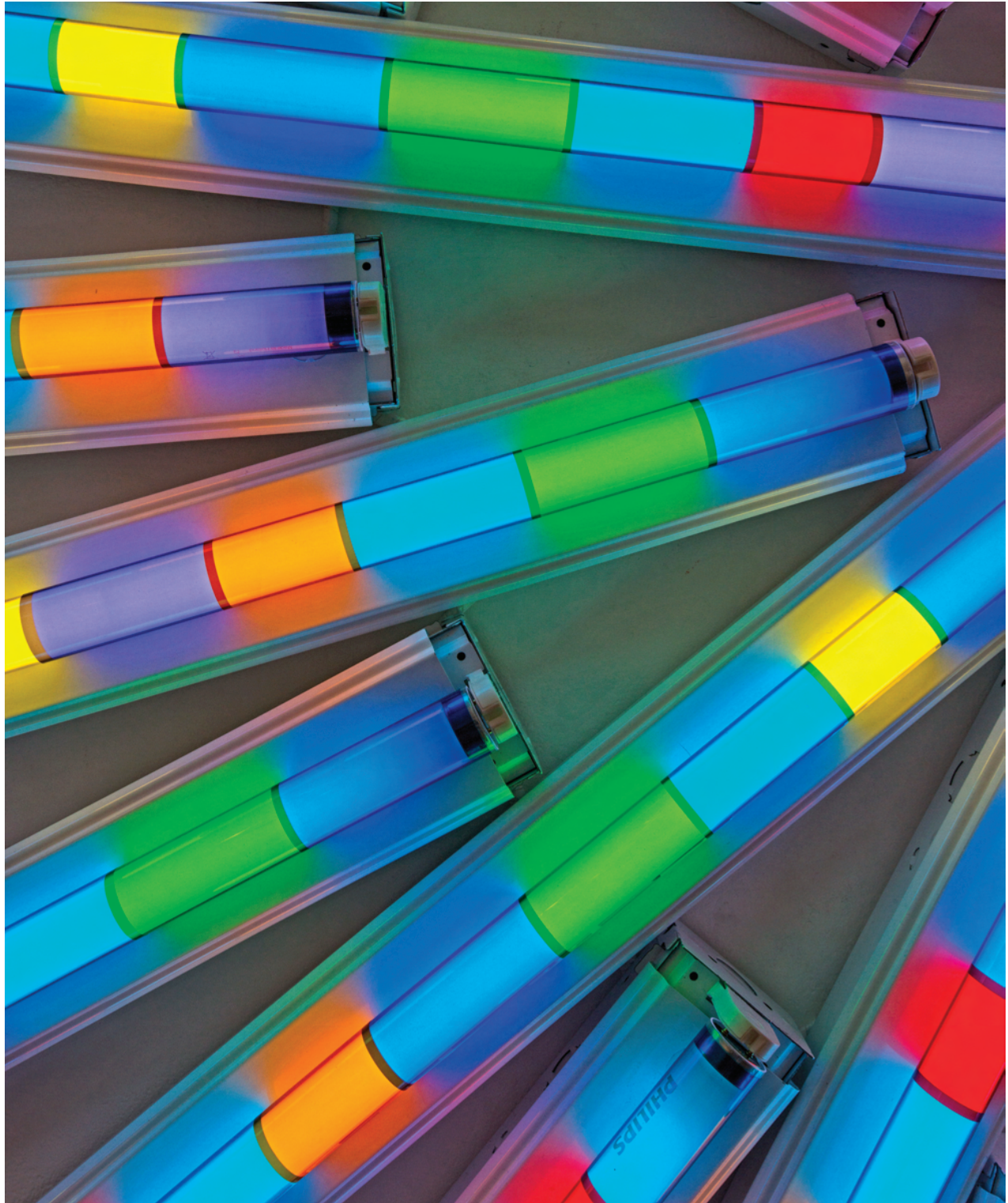


ARTnews



**Spencer Finch Follows the Light • Learning from Cézanne's Apples
Tips on Facing a Blank Canvas • The Paradox of Black Abstraction**

Robert Longo

Metro Pictures and Petzel

"I was one of those guys that got blamed for the '80s," Robert Longo once remarked, referring to his iconic 1979 installation *Men in the Cities*, which prefigured the shoot-em-up, Reaganesque '80s. Those drastic images of collapsing urbanites were followed by charcoal depictions of black flags, handguns, crashing waves, and atomic-bomb blasts. Longo's subject has always been power.

Longo's two recent, interrelated exhibitions featured the starkest, most metaphoric, and most impressive work he has done to date. At Metro Pictures, "Gang of Cosmos" (from Walt Whitman's preface to *Leaves of Grass*) was a competitive homage of sorts to artistic power: formidable charcoal replicas of 12 paintings by 12 members of the Abstract Expressionist generation. Shown without glass, the drawings were astonishing tours de force. De Kooning's *Woman and Bicycle* (1952–53), its painterly brushstrokes translated into charcoal, took the prize. Longo's version of Frankenthaler's *Mountains and Sea* (1952) managed to capture that artist's watery washes in dry trompe l'oeil carbon. Pollock's *Autumn Rhythm Number 30* (1950) appeared with a silvery ground. And if Ad Reinhardt could see his



After Frankenthaler (Mountains and Sea, 1952), 2014, charcoal on mounted paper, 70" x 95". Metro Pictures.

own black-on-black *Abstract Painting* (1963) replicated in pure fragile carbon dust by Longo, he might chortle at the ironies, and how his own self-revealing effects had been duplicated.

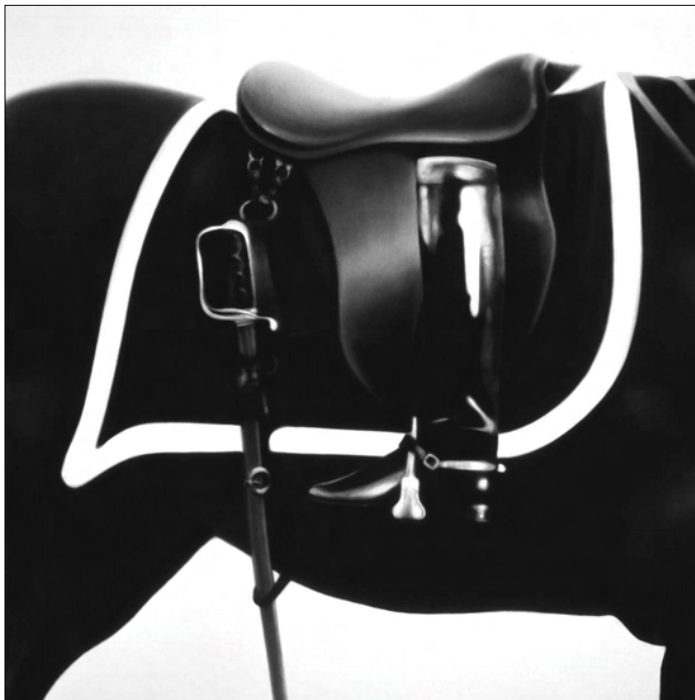
The Metro Pictures press release referred to the historical magnitude of the first generation of American artists to advance modern art—a turning point for

American art—but said nary a word about the appropriationists, who were, back in the 1980s, Longo's contemporaries. However, Longo's recent monumental drawings of paintings are equally about the act of appropriating iconic images of esthetic power that were then exploited for political ends as they are about the differing methodologies of drawing and painting.

At Petzel, "Strike the Sun" (the title quotes Herman Melville's Captain Ahab) showcased the seven implacable panels of *Untitled (Capitol)*, 2012–13, an enormous image of unadulterated political power with an oppressive night sky, and—for those attuned to minutiae—quirky window details and one missing streetlamp. It also featured *Untitled (The Pequod)*, 2014, a 17-foot-high, black, wax-coated flag sculpture that loomed ominously even as it seemed to sink into the floor.

Completing the historical associations of another national turning point were Longo's cropped charcoal image of Black Jack, the riderless horse—boot backward in the stirrup—at JFK's funeral, and two drawings of a silver Kennedy half-dollar: head and tail, tiny on opposite walls. A small black Reinhardt painting-as-drawing at Petzel referred to the Metro Pictures show, while at Metro, the 1963 Rudzwick photo of the riderless horse joined the two exhibitions—a nice final touch.

—Kim Levin



Untitled (Black Jack Boot), 2014, charcoal on mounted paper, 63" x 63". Petzel.