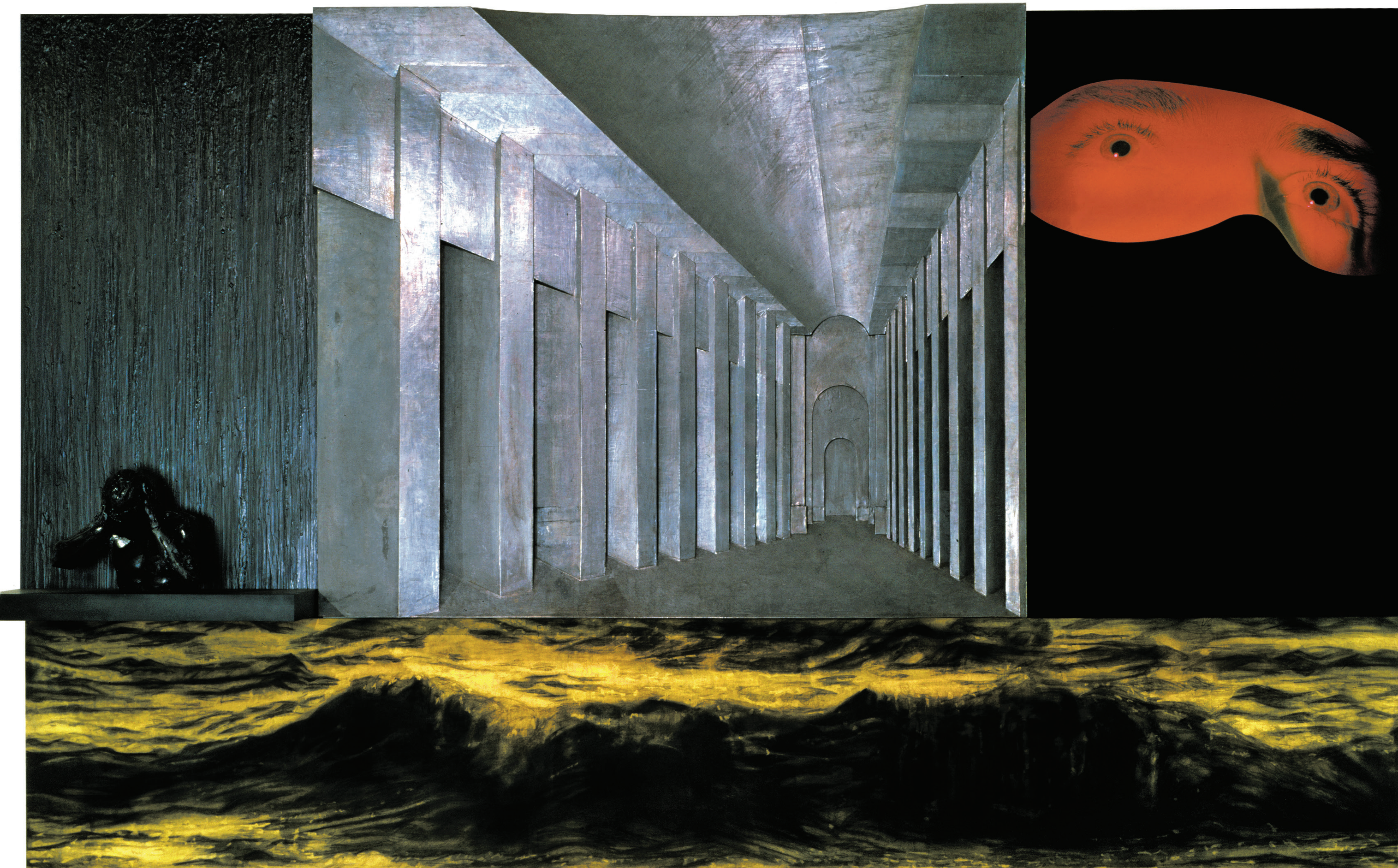
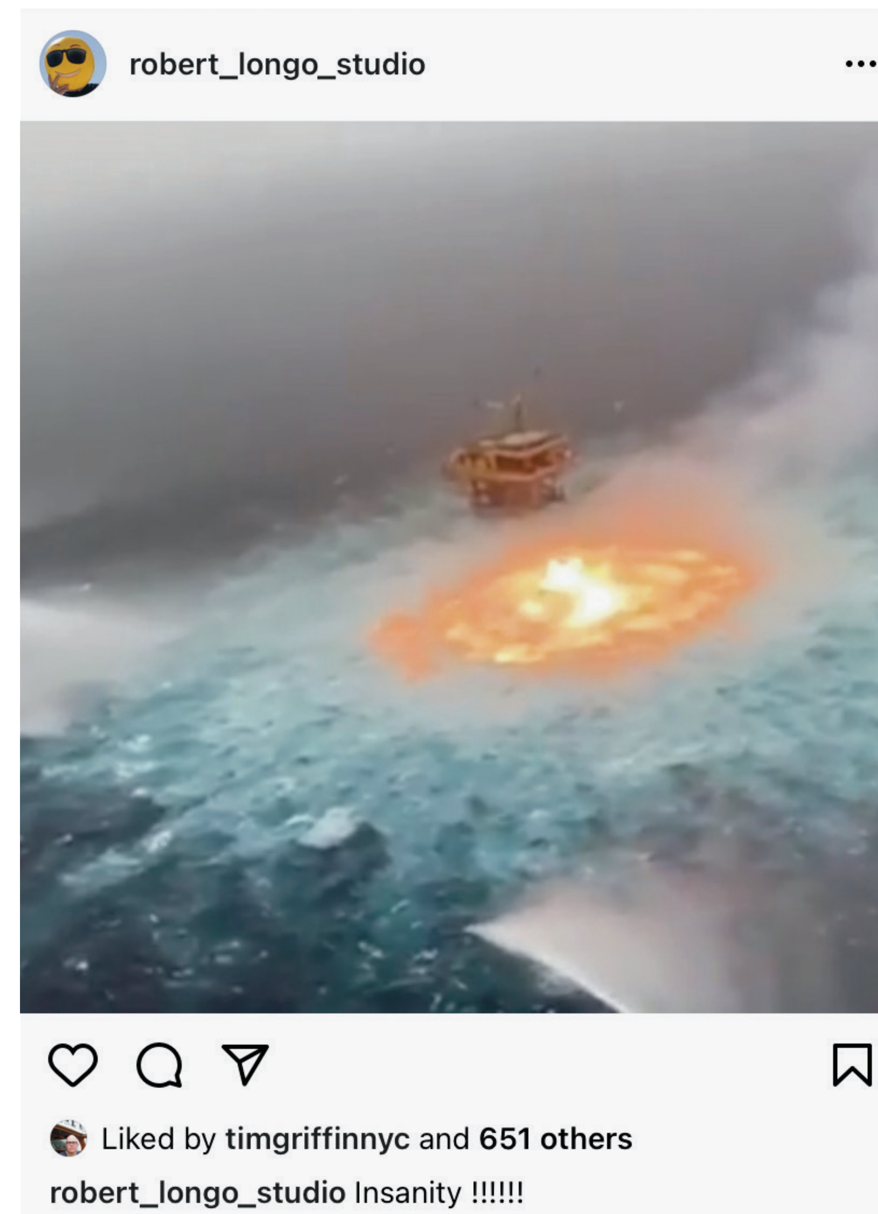
MORE REAL THAN REAL

TIM GRIFFIN ON THE ART OF ROBERT LONGO

This page: **Robert Longo, *Tongue to the Heart*, 1984,** acrylic, oil on wood, cast plaster, hammered lead on wood, Durotran, acrylic charcoal, and graphite on canvas, 11' 4" × 18' × 2' 1".

Opposite page: **Screenshot of a July 3, 2021, Instagram post by Robert Longo.**





THE IMAGE IS EPIC, iconic, alien: Massive rings of singed-orange fire belch from boiling waves that menace nearby drilling platforms, the conflagration dwarfing the vessels en route to douse its flames. And although the cause of the sublime blaze is concrete enough—a gas leak from an underwater pipeline in the gulf off the Yucatán Peninsula—the scene's elemental yet unreal appearance would nevertheless prompt the *New York Times* to turn to cinematic description, opening its coverage by noting how the inferno "drew comparisons to Mordor, the volcanic hellscape from 'The Lord of The Rings.'"

Any awe inspired by this picture, however, is inseparable from the resolutely contemporary manner in which it is apt to be encountered: as a grand spectacle discovered on the scrolling screen of an ordinary smartphone fitting in the palm, and seen on a friend's social media feed as easily as on any news platform. By such measures, the character of the image itself—what's truly captured by it—becomes unnervingly ambiguous. On the one hand, the photograph, horrifically implicating the technical and economic infrastructures around it, renders something so immense that it approaches abstraction, standing on the cusp of comprehensibility; on the other, the event's archetypal form is nevertheless dispersed and fugitive, and continually deferred. Put another way, the advanced technological infrastructures that made this disaster possible also contribute to its dissipation in the public consciousness. (The sheer unreality of the event is only redoubled by the present condition of the photographic image, whose indexical capacity has long eroded, and which seems by now infinitely expansive and mutable in its distribution.[1]) And beyond the disarming ethereality created by something so colossal and remote being "shared" online, such a paradoxical quality becomes all the more palpable as one scrolls from image to image, each one incongruous with—and swept away by—the next.

Yet for all these respects, there remained for me one facet of particularity when seeing the photograph: I couldn't help but recognize how fitting it was to have found this particular picture on the Instagram feed of Robert Longo, whose take on the image seemed to beg for a reassessment not only of our planet's predicaments but also of the attending contours and conditions of representation in the contemporary public realm. As the artist wrote in a one-word caption for the picture, articulating its radical swirl of contingencies: "Insanity !!!!!!"

THE SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORM on which Longo's post appears summons, even formalizes, some of the speculative premises of his most prominent work, made shortly after his emergence in the 1970s. If the artist's "Combines," 1982–89, such as *We Want God*, 1983–84, or *Tongue to the Heart*, 1984—composed of seemingly random image fragments whose juxtapositions refused to coalesce into coherent narratives—were widely received at the time as rebus-like extrapolations from media culture's syntactical logic, mimicking in both representation and physical materials the abrupt televisual disjunctions of, say, channel changes and commercial breaks, the effects of such propositions by now seem only the systemic basis for network platforms such as Instagram.[2] Similarly, if a younger Longo once said that audiences of his work confronted "misplaced dramas"—e.g., in *Corporate Wars: Walls of Influence*, 1982, where dramatic action is ambiguous enough to put viewers at an interpretive impasse, having to formulate and project narrative onto the image—then such imagistic blank verse is positively idiomatic in visual culture today. (Pictures perennially arrive, are taken out of context, and are displaced, awaiting captioning and recaptioning by their viewers, both individually and collectively. The act of captioning, and the connections among the people composing such texts, eclipse the picture.) And if the compositions of such early works seem to have been oriented around mass-media imagery's "obsession with intensity" as much as around the explicit subject matter of any picture—to the degree that the artist risked seeming infatuated with the mass media and was continually called to account for skirting any clear distinction between criticality and complicity—so it is that the posts surrounding Longo's interjection online seem a hyperarticulation of such a drive toward equivalence.[3] Each posted image is also an emblem, no matter the subject, hewing to a standardized formatting while possessing a taut capacity and intent for affective charge. (On this note, it is tempting to compare the modeling of Longo's most recent installations with online scrolling—featuring as they do sequences of high-intensity images of uniform format and scale that nevertheless range wildly among sources and subjects. He remains attuned to the presentational languages of our moment.)

Left: **Robert Longo, *Untitled (Cindy)*, 1981**, charcoal and graphite on paper, 96 × 60". From the series "Men in the Cities," 1979–83.

Below: **Robert Longo, *Untitled (Eric)*, 1981**, charcoal and graphite on paper, 96 × 48". From the series "Men in the Cities," 1979–83.

Opposite page, top: **Robert Longo, *Johnny Mnemonic in Black & White*, 2021**, HD video, black-and-white, sound, 96 minutes. Johnny Mnemonic (Keanu Reeves).

Opposite page, bottom: **Still from Living Colour's 1988 video *Middle Man*, directed by Robert Longo.**

Seen against the backdrop of such confluences, Longo's practice takes on an uncanny sci-fi quality, creating a perspectival sense of our inhabiting the mass culture of a future envisioned in a more analog past. The experience of his work is a bit like reading the prologue text for Longo's *Johnny Mnemonic*—a Hollywood feature film directed by the artist in 1995 that celebrates its twenty-sixth anniversary this year with a rerelease in black-and-white—which describes civilization at the dawn of the 2020s, when information is weaponized and a virus is sweeping the world. (The turn to the noirish visual scope—paired with the low-rent technologies featured on-screen—has the odd effect of making the film seem more contemporary, more finely attuned to today's failed future.) Yet such a strong resonance should also prompt some consideration of how the relatively clear migration of Longo's artistic techniques to mass media and social networking platforms over the decades might be accompanied by a corresponding shift in the viable tactical models for artistic engagements with the vocabulary of that larger culture. The basic terms have changed.

Longo has, in fact, already shown a capacity for anticipating such transformations, particularly those linked to moments of cultural anxiety and even crisis, and for evolving his engagements in turn. Certainly, this was demonstrated some thirty years ago, at another moment when the discursive systems of art were decomposing—and when, more specifically, the critical paradigms of postmodernism were quickly coming to a close. Writing in the catalogue for Longo's last US retrospective, at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in 1989, Hal Foster noted how postmodernism's models—for each of which Longo's work had been a "privileged example" just five years earlier—had largely become "givens" for artists and thus lost their critical viability.[4] As Foster explained, postmodernism during the previous two decades could usefully be separated into three registers, each of which Longo had passed through before it had "shown its limits": a "pictures" model, taking up the textual nature of representation; an "allegory" model, outlined by Craig Owens, underlining the "gap between an image . . . and its meaning"; and, finally, a "spectacle" model, which called into question how images were in the service of capital and underscored the erosion of our sense of reality as a consequence of mass communications.[5] Regarding the last, Foster noted that Jean Baudrillard's notion of obscenity—public commercial imagery and machinations readily intruding on the most intimate aspects of one's psyche—had been particularly incisive and might yet have tenability. It would be in such a vein, he observed, that Longo's practice, which had rolled through those earlier phases, would have traction in the future.

But to discern the artistic contours of such tenability now, it is worth further considering the analyses of Owens—one of Longo's earliest champions—alongside others articulated by the artist himself. When seeking to describe the terms of allegory, and of postmodernism more broadly, Owens spoke of how the artists of his day often possessed the "look" of the very visual culture they sought to deconstruct—which, he said, inevitably clouded any easy, overt distinction between criticality and complicity. As the critic suggested, "Postmodern work must provisionally accept the terms and conditions it sets out to expose"[6]; it is bound by "the unavoidable necessity of participating in the very activity that is being denounced precisely in order to denounce it."[7] But Owens's account notably emphasized art in the context of the museum, where artists such as Rauschenberg needed to be housed for their critiques to be legible—whereas Longo put forward a different perspective from the start. Even setting aside Longo's explicit infiltrations of mass culture—from his efforts at Hollywood filmmaking to the music videos he directed for bands such as R.E.M., New Order, Living Colour, and Megadeth—his work commonly set in motion a projective economy.[8] Longo has noted that even his "Men in the Cities" drawings, 1979–83, generated an expanding network that "became more complicated, [as] more and more people became involved in the making of these works. It moved from drawings, to reliefs, to performances, to combines, to films. . . . As the work was exposed to the public, it was consumed."[9]

In other words, by Longo's account, his practice has always extended into a larger sphere of cultural production and reception and has become most legible when seen in dialogue with the latter's infrastructures. Longo's Instagram post, while not art per se, offers a kind of parallax view of this relationship—particularly as the erosion of reality described by Foster has

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become a given within and beyond mass communications. Indeed, if much art around the time of Longo's emergence took as its task the deconstruction of myths, so many of those in our present day (whether political, social, or environmental) are crumbling by themselves before our very eyes. Interrogations of representation must become, if not also give way to, interrogations of reception. And Longo's posted image of environmental catastrophe articulates the contextual ground to which his art necessarily responds, suggesting that another metric is wanted by which to measure our experience of contemporary representations—a metric pursuant to Baudrillard's propositions around obscenity some forty years ago.

Perhaps this contextual and tactical shift becomes clearer when one takes stock of Longo's own assessments of how his art addresses audiences. Whereas the artist decades ago noted explicitly that his work prompted viewers to reflect on and pursue their own desire to make sense of the imagery he set before them—they were activated as reflexive, interpretative agents—today he channels a different set of terms linking public setting and private psychology and considers how each gives the other shape. As he says, "My works have to feel like you have seen them before even if you have not. They are more real than real."[10] In a sense, his images, especially his large-scale works in charcoal, which he has been making since 1999, acknowledge unreality in advance—mimicking, if anything, how imagery and narratives are fabricated and making our response to such fabrications his subject. Importantly, too, his drawings are not Photorealist but instead are composites of numerous images, arranged to create an impactful composition. The heaving wave that swells beneath a boat of refugees was taken from another image and placed beneath that vessel; the figure at the center of a rendering of the Women's March of 2017 looms against a bright light, having been placed in the foreground as if the entire scene were being viewed through a deep-focus lens; and the oppressive dark clouds shrouding a state-sponsored sculpture for the Confederacy were also taken from elsewhere, their presence creating a similarly cinematic distortion of perspective. (Here, Longo's practice is projective but also strangely antiquated: He will fill notebook pages with general shapes that he desires to produce in his large-scale charcoals; but the works' final realization happens within an atelier system in his studio on Lafayette Street in downtown Manhattan.) He creates historical works for a time when the very construction of history is newly and continually unsettled, inevitably underlining how, and why, subjects are apt to recast meaning on their own terms. Longo elaborates on

Opposite page: **Robert Longo, *Untitled (Black Pussy Hat in Women's March)*, 2017,** charcoal on mounted paper, 60 × 106⅝".

Below: **Robert Longo, *Untitled (Robert E. Lee Monument Graffiti for George Floyd; Richmond, Virginia, 2020)*, 2021**, charcoal on mounted paper, 8' × 12' 2".

Bottom: **Robert Longo, *Untitled (Refugees Moonbird Sighting, Mediterranean Sea; May 5, 2017)*, 2019,** charcoal on mounted paper, 97 × 120".

his idea of images that are more real than real: "I make pictures not of what I see, but of what I feel. The rage. And this is the question I prompt in people looking at my work: *How does it make you feel?*"

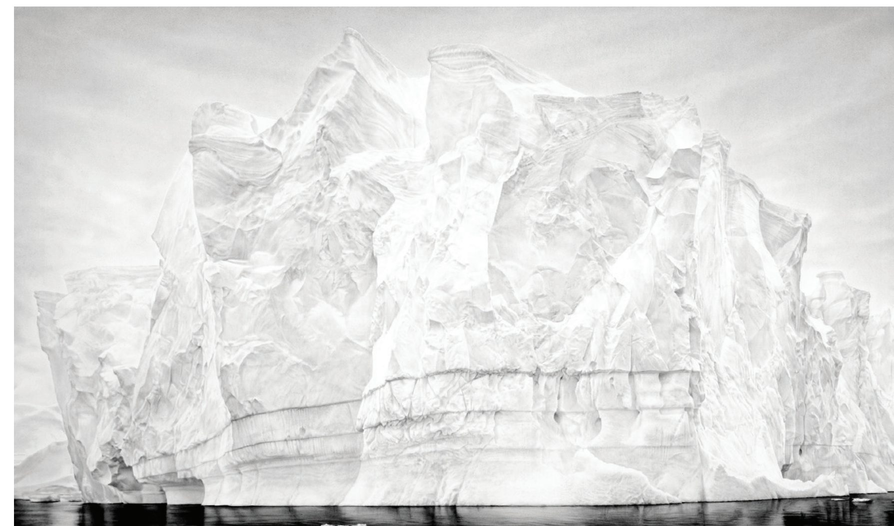
CRITICS HAVE HISTORICALLY DISCUSSED Longo's work in terms of loss—specifically around a lost sense of reality that may well have begun following the rise of mass communications but which is often manifested most explicitly in questions of representation as they traffic in the realm of politics. In Foster's consideration of Longo's citations of public statuary, frieze, and classical architecture at the start of his career—in pieces from *Tongue to the Heart*, which featured a hall in the style of Albert Speer, to *Culture Culture*, 1982–83, which featured the image of a statue in New York City honoring Simón Bolívar—the scholar mused on how authoritarian aesthetics typically arise in society, noting in particular the role of mythmaking by regimes wishing to prop up and sustain particular histories. Myths, in other words, become substitutes or stand-ins for a lost (and frequently imaginary) structure and set of social assumptions. And in this context, statuary becomes crucial for maintaining public power and authority, providing touchstones by which to organize space, time, and history and lock them into place.

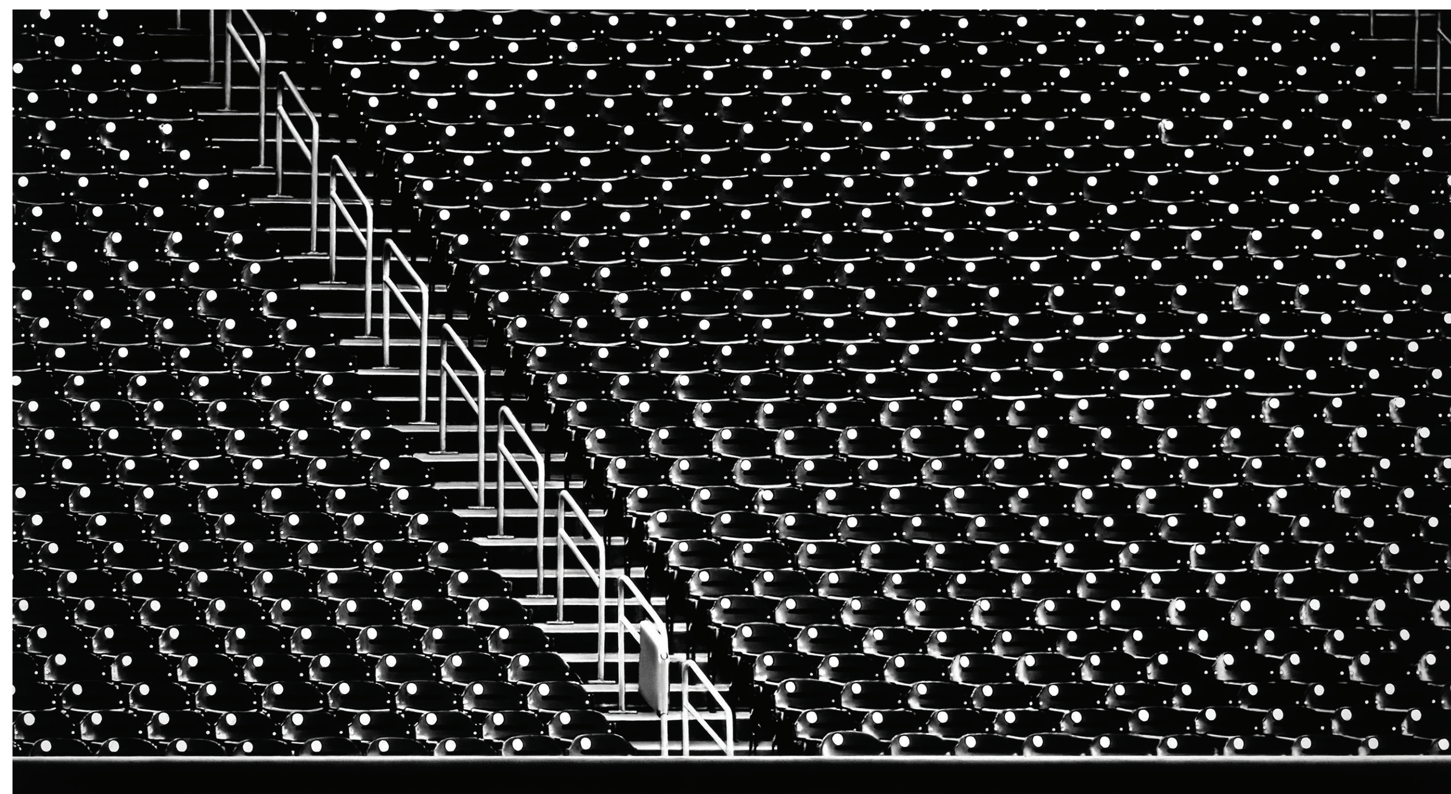
In *Tongue to the Heart* and *Culture Culture*, the artist's invocations suggest illuminating parallels between historical authoritarianism and mythmaking and then-contemporary American culture. (More recently, Longo's reproductions of AbEx works in charcoal underscore another loss of historical certitude. He renders these paintings in a vulnerable medium at the moment when their aesthetic, and the artists' underlying subjectivity, seem relics of another construction of American art and history.[11]) But in the artist's most recent body of works, such dilemmas are brought explicitly to bear on American society. In *Untitled (Robert E. Lee Monument Graffiti for George Floyd; Richmond, Virginia, 2020)*, 2021, Longo takes up the embattled public sculpture as an object linked directly to the organization of American history—and to the fractured country's wide-ranging and obfuscating self-mythologizing, whether regarding the Lost Cause or its fundamental innocence as a city on a hill—while focusing on the multifarious graffiti covering the object's surface as part of racial-justice uprisings during the summer of 2020 and after. Indeed, consuming the statue are layers of marks, what Michel de Certeau in another era of protest would have called "dancing graphics . . . that make some parts of the city disappear and exaggerate others, distorting it, fragmenting it, and diverting it from its immobile order."[12] Any structuring of history by the monument is subverted and overrun by a multiplicity of expressions uncontainable by any complete, fixed cultural narrative. Literally, in this work, different speeds and cadences are denoted in Longo's rendering of different marks made originally with spray paint and stencils.[13] (In keeping with Longo's understanding of art's imbrication in society, the artist frequently donates proceeds from his installations to causes associated with his subjects. For the exhibition of this newest work, for example, proceeds will support the Equal Justice Initiative, a Montgomery, Alabama–based nonprofit working to end mass incarceration and abolish the death penalty.)

Such alterity, crucially, is also realized in the choice of materials by Longo, whose work in charcoal intentionally offers contrasts with the regulated cadences of history—slowing the image down, allowing a spectrum of possible temporalities and perspectives to open within it. In fact, the artist often notes how his compositions, many of them extremely large, are figurative but abstract when seen up close; the static images in turn become democratic objects, allowing viewers' eyes to roam the surface at will, freed from the dictates of digital platforms. (Virilio suggested that speed

would always win in a technocratic society; and Longo introduces an artistic jiujitsu, affording viewers a new distance to measure between themselves and the thing seen.) If Longo speaks of tensions in his work between figuration and abstraction, however, it has more frequently been in the sense that he summons an awareness of the systems—natural or manufactured—underlying or surrounding whatever he puts on view. In a conversation with scholar Isabelle Graw regarding his enormous charcoals of waves, for example, Longo notes how "their shape is not so much determined by the weather . . . but by what is deep underneath: the shoal."[14] And here one discerns a new development in his work: Whereas his earlier compositions might have evoked surrounding systems, his most recent pieces capture what is made visible when the myths can no longer obscure what lies beneath the surface, and when representations no longer function as they once did—or, perhaps most accurately, when the unreal finally meets the real.

AMONG OTHER RECENT WORKS, this newly visible "loss" may be found in a large-scale charcoal rendering of an iceberg, the very sight of which reminds the viewer of the ecological instability of our planet. Typically, most of this object lies out of sight beneath the waves, but in our times, what has long lain beneath has been coming to the surface, and this is true of cultural contradictions as well. The lines crossing the ice near the base of this iceberg mark the object's slow rise out of the water as it begins to melt away. And a similar sense of emerging visibility as the evidence of crumbling myths is found in numerous other images by Longo in the installation, even in the relatively banal setting of *Untitled (Baseball Stadium, 2020)*, 2021, where each seat is visible thanks to the absence of spectators. (Viewed from another perspective, it's a picture of an economic and entertainment model beginning to fail. From this perspective, the piece echoes Longo's own "Freud Cycle" works, 2000–2004, which featured the psychoanalyst's empty chair as photographed in his office shortly before the Nazi invasion of Austria.) Such moments hearken back as well to the failures of representation conveyed by Longo in earlier drawings of political events and people that capture idiosyncrasies in the mediums through which their appearances circulate: *Untitled (Prisoners, Kandahar Airport)*, 2016, for example, depicts the graininess of the original infrared telephoto image of prisoners being transported to a CIA black site, as well as the dot pattern of the photograph's reproduction in a newspaper; and *Untitled (Jamal Ahmad Khashoggi; Istanbul, Turkey; October 2, 2018)*, 2019, displays the journalist as he appeared in a low-quality television transmission.





Right, above: **Robert Longo, *Untitled (The Crown)*, 2021,** charcoal on mounted paper, 70 × 120".

Right: **Robert Longo, *Untitled (Baseball Stadium, 2020)*, 2021,** charcoal on mounted paper, 65 × 120".

Opposite page, top: **Robert Longo, *Untitled (Capitol)*, 2012–13,** charcoal on mounted paper. Installation view, Petzel Gallery, New York, 2014.

Opposite page, bottom: **Robert Longo, *Untitled (Insurrection at the U.S. Capitol; January 6th, 2021; Based on a photograph by Mark Peterson)*, 2021,** charcoal on mounted paper, 7'8" × 11'2".

Longo's most recent pieces capture what is made visible when the myths can no longer obscure what lies beneath the surface.

View of “Robert Longo: I do fly/After summer merrily,” 2021, Pace Gallery, New York. From left: *Untitled (The Cauldron)*; *Untitled (Baseball Stadium, 2020)*; *Dürer’s Solid*; *Untitled (Robert E. Lee Monument Graffiti for George Floyd; Richmond, Virginia, 2020)*, all 2021. Photo: Jonathan Nesteruk.

Opposite page: Robert Longo, *Untitled (Opioid, Oxycontin)*, 2018, charcoal on mounted paper, 88¼ × 70".

Yet, crucially for such technological glitches and stutters, as well as for the new visibility of crumbling systems, anchoring Longo’s exhibition “Strike the Sun” at New York’s Petzel Gallery in 2014 was a large multipanel charcoal rendering of the Capitol building, which the artist compared to the *Pequod* in *Moby Dick*. In his newest work, it is difficult not to connect that work with a new drawing titled *Untitled (Insurrection at the U.S. Capitol; January 6th, 2021; Based on a photograph by Mark Peterson)*, 2021—a composition that puts into play the very production of representation as it mediates both symbolic and physical experience. Though the piece’s evocation of public friezes recalls Longo’s earlier works, such as *Corporate Wars*, here the insurrectionists at the Capitol are seen documenting themselves, seeking to create their own representations in real time—ingesting them, as it were, and ensuring their images—and mythmaking is a defining part of the scene. Owens once observed that Longo’s work realizes a “blind confrontation of antithetical meanings,” and in this picture the machinations for such dissensus are grounded in the physical environment. Longo commemorates the fundamental mutability of a political moment: a reality rendered a provisional scenario, a self-representation readying itself for narration. And, as we know, the emotions of the viewer are apt to determine the narrative: whether these figures are insurrectionists or patriots, assaulters or heirs of these halls in all their symbolism. The feeling—or the rage—will guide the collective reading.

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Such a reflexive awareness of the symbolic functions of the world around us—the staging of reality in a moment of crisis and the transparency of mythmaking today—makes Longo’s latest exhibitions all the more intriguing for his choice of installation aesthetics. By his own description, Longo most often deploys dramatic theatrical lighting, making the gallery into a kind of theater, indicating to viewers that they are entering a representational sphere. On occasion, he has even installed a red carpet and velvet ropes (expanding, notably, on Hans Haacke’s 1982 Documenta 7 installation, which featured such a carpet leading to a portrait of Ronald Reagan). Now, Longo has turned to ordinary gallery lighting, creating a kind of desert of the real, which is all the more empty thanks to his decision to display his charcoal drawings for the first time in many years without any protection: However monumental or iconic his works may seem in reproduction, here in physical space their materiality, both sumptuous and fugitive, is immediately discernible. For the second part of his autumn, two-part installation at Pace Gallery in New York, charcoal drawings will be arranged in a simple series along a single wall, rendering visible what has been systemically occluded in America’s myths of itself, and has lately risen to the fore: OxyContin pills, a field of cotton, a Native American headdress, and a bird’s broken wing.

Longo’s decision to avoid protecting his work lends it a new physicality and sense of contingency—and a renewed emphasis on the physical world—but it also suggests a fundamental move away from the screen. Though he has long made charcoal drawings, they have often been mediated by Plexiglas, and for him, that device is indebted to his perpetually mediated experience with images seen on television, on his computer, or on his smartphone. Protective Plexiglas additionally reflects the gallery and museum environs, implicating the architecture, the viewers themselves, and the underlying social and economic systems that made the viewing experience possible, with all its protocols, customs, and expectations. In its absence, such reflections disappear, but Longo here has introduced a kind of inversion: Placed in the middle of the room is a large reflective sculpture based on Dürer’s solid, an enigmatic polyhedron that appears in the old master’s *Melencolia I*, 1514—a drawing of which Longo has also produced for this exhibition. The object’s and image’s twin presences create an uncanny tension between the two- and three-dimensional, calling to mind Longo’s numerous projects playing across frieze and surface, volume and image. (In terms of both materials and politics, it’s noteworthy that Longo says his greatest lesson from his time as an assistant to Paul Sharits was grasping what happens when a medium becomes disorganized, with its protocols and conventions beginning to loosen.) But it necessarily draws attention to Dürer’s own predicament, as famously outlined by Erwin Panofsky in his analysis of the work, which the scholar considered the artist’s spiritual self-portrait—surrounded by the tools of representation but nevertheless unable to “solve the interior mystery of the world.” It is the portrayal of loss as something dispositional for any creative artist, but, understood differently here—in a gallery holding an object paralleling the one in Dürer’s picture—it speaks to the wanted use for those tools of representation. What might be lost is less a thing than a function in the midst of our unreality. And yet the artist and the viewer are left finding their way toward the next narrative. □

Robert Longo’s “I do fly / After summer merrily” remains on view at Pace Gallery, New York, through October 23.

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For notes, see page 196.

NOTES

1. Among the most succinct statements by Longo regarding his work is his assertion that "I'm an abstract artist working representationally." This remark pertains to how his figural compositions dissipate into so many marks when looked at from up close, but it is more resonant with respect to a societal context in which traditional distinctions between abstraction and realism are dubious at best. "Drawing the Line: A Conversation Between Isabelle Graw and Robert Longo," in *Stand* (Ostfildern, Germany: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2014), 69. Regarding that tension, consider as well Brecht's notion of realism as "laying bare society's causal network." See John Willet, ed., *Brecht on Theatre* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974), 109; and George Baker, "Photography and Abstraction," in *Words Without Pictures* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2009), 361. In Baker's text, the scholar brings up Brecht specifically in reference to debates in photography regarding the relationship of abstraction and figuration to larger postindustrial economic structures in society. Against such a backdrop, it is the object that may offer a stronger perspective on the vast "abstraction" of networked and perpetually calibrating and adapting models of production—whereas the image of abstraction, offering no refuge or resistance, as was once postulated by artists of the modern era (Malevich, for example), is readily trafficked. Longo's abstraction within figuration is all the more intriguing in such a context.

2. Notably, many of the "Combines" possessed a heavy physical presence in the gallery setting and even created a sense of oppressiveness in their depictions of individuals therein. As Howard N. Fox surmises, "Most of Longo's protagonists are passive subjects, performing roles imposed upon them. Even the Everyman figures are molded by forces external to themselves." See retrospective catalogue, 33–34.

3. Speaking of how the "look" of mass-media images is taken on by Longo's own work, Foster cites Fredric Jameson: "The silence of affect in postmodernism is doubled with a new gratification in surfaces and accompanied by a whole new ground tone in which the pathos of high modernism has been inverted into a strange new exhilaration, the high, the intensité." This intensity, Jameson says, comes out of cultural "schizophrenia" witnessed in the breakdown of time. Jameson's "Postmodernism and Consumer Society," cited in Hal Foster, "Contemporary Art and Spectacle," in *Recodings: Art, Spectacle, Cultural Politics* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1985), 90.

4. Hal Foster, "Atrocity Exhibition," in *Robert Longo*, exh. cat. (New York: Rizzoli, 1989), 56.

5. Ibid., 52.

6. Craig Owens, *Beyond Recognition: Representation, Power, and Culture*, ed. Scott Bryson, Barbara Kruger, Lynne Tillman, and Jane Weinstock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 78.

7. Ibid., 85. Owens's remark finds roots in Guy Debord's observation, "To analyze the spectacle means talking its language to some degree—to the degree, in fact, that we are obliged to engage the methodology of the society to which the spectacle gives expression. For what the spectacle expresses is the total practice of one particular economic and social formation; it is, so to speak, that formation's agenda. It also happens to be the historical moment by which we happen to be governed." Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith. (New York: Zone Books, 1994), 15.

8. With respect to activated networks, it's essential to underline the importance of artist Gretchen Bender's editing for these music videos—which, when it came to R.E.M.s "The One I Love," earned Longo a nomination for best director at the MTV Awards in 1987.

9. Howard N. Fox, "In Civil War," in *Robert Longo*, 29.

10. Robert Longo, in conversation with the author, August 4, 2021. While I do not develop the question here, it is interesting to consider Longo's set of operations underpinning this effect, used to produce resolved images with narrative potential (by other artists working today as well), in contrast with those attributed to artists of Longo's generation by Benjamin H. D. Buchloh in his famous "Allegorical Procedures: Appropriation and Montage in Contemporary Art"; the scholar describes an "appropriation and depletion of meaning, fragmentation and dialectical juxtaposition of fragments, and separation of signifier and signified." Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Allegorical Procedures: Appropriation and Montage in Contemporary Art," *Artforum* (September 1982), 43–56.

11. Longo's use of statuary has not always been oriented around the deconstruction of figures of power. In the broken figure depicted by *Untitled (Statue of Marianne; Paris, France; December 1, 2018)*, 2019, one encounters a symbol of a potentially crumbling idea of democratic governance: a "ruin" arising in our own times.

12. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Randall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 102.

13. Intriguingly, when it comes to renderings that are faithful to the actual markings they depict, Longo notes that his experience is akin to that of music—playing a score that is a kind of "nervous system" and that measures the distance between his position, and subjectivity, and that of anyone who created the original mark. He slows down the gestures of AbEx, for example, and grapples with how physical action by the artist might have signified, or been felt, in that earlier era; and regarding this statue, he "feels" the rage of those who marked differently, by stencil, spray paint, or any other medium.

14. "Drawing the Line," 66. Making clear such ties and schisms between seen and unseen, representation and underlying reality, and individual and unspoken social order is also key to any consideration of Longo's numerous charcoal renderings of X-ray images of modern paintings such as Manet's *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*, 1882.