

“Everything starts with drawing”

ROBERT LONGO in conversation with J. CABELLE AHN

Since the 1970s, the multi-hyphenate American artist Robert Longo (b. 1953) has been using charcoal drawings (e.g., Fig. 1)¹ to examine the channels of image transmission and consumption. Longo is one of the leading voices of the Pictures Generation, a label given to the group of artists featured in Douglas Crimp’s landmark 1977 exhibition (simply titled *Pictures*), which argued that postmodern art is characteristically visual—a rebuke of the critic Leo Steinberg’s inherently textual interpretation of the movement.² In addition to unearthing the prejudices of visual media through sculpture, film, and performing arts, in 1974 Longo co-founded Hallwalls, a seminal artist-run exhibition space that would come to define the avant-garde art scene in Buffalo, NY.³ In the decades since, he has tirelessly pushed the technical limitations of charcoal as a medium while drawing upon histories of art to dissect the contemporary moment.

Last year Longo was the subject of four simultaneous solo exhibitions. Two were retrospectives: *Robert Longo* at the Albertina in Vienna (4 September 2024–26 January 2025), and *Robert Longo: The Acceleration of History* at the Milwaukee Art Museum (25 October 2024–23 February 2025). The others were joint presentations of new works at major commercial galleries in London: Pace Gallery (9 October–9 November 2024) and Thad-daeus Ropac (9 October–20 November 2024). The latter pair of shows marked Longo’s return to what he calls “combines” (e.g., Fig. 2),⁴ a body of work he had not revisited since the 1980s. Although he borrowed the term from Robert Rauschenberg’s



Figure 1

ROBERT LONGO

Untitled (Eric);
from the *Men in
the Cities* series,
1979–83

Milan, Fondazione
Prada (© Robert
Longo)

hybridizations of painting and sculpture, Longo’s “combines” operate more as montages, but always include drawings among the mixed media.

At this juncture between gazing back and gazing ahead, Longo spoke to *Master Drawings* about his relationship to drawing as an art form, his technical processes and use of charcoal, and his “ways of



Figure 2

ROBERT LONGO
Pressure, 1982–88
New York, Museum
of Modern Art
(© Robert Longo)

Figure 3

View of Robert
Longo's Studio
(with *Untitled*
[*Dirty Boy*] in
progress), 2021



looking.” The following interview was conducted over Zoom on 7 November 2024 and has been edited and condensed for clarity.

J. Cabelle Ahn (JCA): Your exhibition catalogues often—if not always—include images of your studio (Figs. 3–4):⁵ empty, studies flanking large-scale works, and the studio walls filled with different types of mark making. Given the history of charcoal, it almost feels like an intentional reference to prehistoric cave drawings and to the long history of artists (such as Bernini or Michelangelo) who were driven by inspiration to start drawing on the walls.⁶ How does this continued inclusion of images of the studio reflect how you wish to position your practice?

Robert Longo (RL): I’ve never liked pictures of artists working. I always thought that was a very intimate thing. The studio is always very loud, music is always blasting and it’s quite intense. So, I like the quietness of these pictures...it looks a bit like an operating room. I always think it’s important to have them in the book, because they provide a sense of scale of the work.⁷ In the studio, the works always seems kind of small to me. When they get out in the world, they seem much bigger.

Figure 4

View of Robert Longo's Studio (with *Untitled [Riot Cops]* in progress), 2016



Figure 5 (below)

ROBERT LONGO

Untitled (After Bosch, Outer Wings from Triptych of *Garden of Earthly Delights*, c. 1500), 2008

Collection of the Artist (© Robert Longo)

JCA: Speaking of scale, the sizes of your drawings are as important as your technique and subject matter. In the *Gang of Cosmos* (2013–14; see Figs. 6–7 below) and the *New Beyond* (2021–22) series, the drawings can be larger than the paintings they reference.⁸ At the same time, you've also produced a series of works—I believe grouped as the *Heritage* series (2006–present)—that are smaller graphite studies of Old Masters that inspire you, from Bosch (Fig. 5)⁹ to Caravaggio.¹⁰ How do you see small scale operating in your work?

RL: You know, I'm interested in the emotional flow of work. With the *Gang of Cosmos*, sometimes the works were smaller, sometimes they're bigger (Figs. 6–7).¹¹ You have to realize that I have these limitations in my medium. I'm limited by the size of the paper and the size of the plexiglass. What's happened is that I've taken that size relationship and tried to work with it. I also think that the scale of the work has a lot to do with the commitment to making a work: that if I make my work as big as I make it, I'm committing a chunk of my life to making that work. I joke about the fact that I'm American and in America, if it's big, it's good.

Anyways, the small ones always reminded me of making these intimate little notes. I went to school briefly for art history in Europe, and I al-





Figure 6

Installation view,
Gang of Cosmos,
at Metro Pictures
Gallery, New York,
2014

ways remember watching all these young students in museums painting, making copies of Rembrandts.¹² The irony in America is, our classical art is Abstract Expressionism, you don't see that many young art students in museums making copies of paintings. So, the little drawings were kind of like meditations. Seeing great masters, you try to dissect them almost on a forensic level to try to understand how they did what they did. What I like so much about art is this democracy of art: you can look at it however way you want to look at it, you can read it however way you want to.

JCA: Part of how I got into art history was that I was living in Paris during my gap year, and I would go to the Louvre in the evening and start sketching after these sculptures and masterpieces. You don't really see that as often here, especially in New York.

Figure 7

ROBERT LONGO
Untitled (After
Krasner, *Birth*,
1956), 2014

Private Collection
(© Robert Longo)

RL: I think the technique of drawing is so critical to be an artist. Drawing, it's fundamentally about looking. You can't draw something completely

out of your head unless you have a photographic memory. *You have to look.* When you want to draw a flower (Fig. 8),¹³ you have to look at every leaf on the flower. There aren't any shortcuts...I think drawing is about learning to see, for sure.

When I describe my work as charcoal drawings, I think it's such a ridiculous term. I mean, my things are basically big paintings made with charcoal. When I tell people I make charcoal drawings, they think I'm making these tiny little things.

I think the other thing is...what I think I draw is atmosphere (Fig. 9).¹⁴ Think about photorealism, for instance. Photorealist painters kind of paint by sections, and then they merge it together. I draw the whole picture almost as an atmosphere. That's what charcoal allows me to do because I use a lot of powder. So, I mean, my drawings are pictures of atmosphere.



Figure 8

ROBERT LONGO

Untitled (Ophelia
21), 2012

Private Collection (©
Robert Longo)



Figure 9 (below)

ROBERT LONGO

Untitled
(Hercynian), 2011

*Bad Homburg vor
der Höhe, Altana
Kulturstiftung.*
(© Robert Longo)



Figure 10

ROBERT LONGO

Untitled (Gabriel's Wing), 2015

Private Collection
(© Robert Longo)

JCA: You cited John Berger throughout this interview cycle, and he notably said that “drawings reveal the process of their own making, their own looking.”¹⁵ There appears to be something about drawing that has a unique relationship with the gaze.

RL: One of the reasons why I ended up using drawing was that it was like this bastard medium that was relegated to the basements of museums. I wanted to elevate drawing to a place next to painting and sculpture. In that sense, I think I was always highly influenced by the scale of Abstract Expressionism. The other thing is, when I was a younger artist, I didn't have the money to use video equipment or photographs, but I had paper, so there was also an economic reason for sure.

JCA: Going back to early in your career, I noticed that one of the first exhibitions you curated alongside Charles Clough at Hallwalls was *Working on Paper* (1975).¹⁶ What made you focus on graphic arts for this early programming?

RL: Well, it was really cheap to hang. We had no money in the beginning, so this was the easiest way of getting a lot of work that didn't require insurance. Ironically, it was a way of getting something that was very intimate on one level—and

getting a lot of it—and not putting pressure on anybody. It was like, “you got anything you want to hang on the wall as a drawing? Great.” It was a very funky situation.

JCA: We were talking about charcoal and its limitations earlier, and I would love to continue to discuss your process. I've always been struck by the wide range of historical tools that are used to apply and erase charcoal: from a hare's foot to a mushroom pit.¹⁷ What tools do you use to apply and erase charcoal?

RL: It's interesting. I've never had any instructions as to how to use charcoal. I went to a very mediocre art school so there were never any instructions about what to do with charcoal other than sketch with it on newspaper pads. Remember that crappy paper? I always had charcoal laying around, but I hated it. It was messy and imprecise. But the way I ended up using it is—during Christmas vacation—the graphite that I always used wasn't in the studio and I wanted to work, so I decided to use charcoal.¹⁸

What's happened with charcoal is, in the studio we've developed our own ways of working with it over the last twenty years. Now we have so many different colors of charcoal: black black, medium black, warm black, gray black, cool black, blue black, neutral black.

A lot of times we grind up the charcoal to make it into powder. We put it on with different kinds of brushes. There are different techniques of doing this. We use projections to project the images roughly. Once we project the image, the background may need to get toned. What we do is, we use brushes that have been chopped off to be very stubby and we kind of rub the underdrawing in with charcoal. My process of working is very much the opposite of traditional painting. In traditional painting, you work from dark to light. The whites in all my drawings are the whites of the paper (Fig. 10),¹⁹ so I'm working from white to dark.

Usually, the last thing that I do are these crunchy "black black" moments (Fig. 11; see also Fig. 26 below)²⁰ with just the stick, where the stick just literally floats on the surface of the paper. So it goes through the projection, the blocking, the finishing, and the atmosphere. Then there's the carving part: once all the charcoal has been applied, the erasing starts. Once the erasing is done, the "black black" happens. There are these stages and we have so many different sized brushes and pounce bags, which are quite amazing. They look like your sock filled with erasers. I've been using the same paper for the last forty years...it's a paper that has just enough texture to evoke almost a photograph. It's not like Seurat's paper (Fig. 12).²¹

JCA: Michallet paper.

RL: My paper has just enough tooth that it evokes almost a photographic grain. It's also a very tough paper. It can handle erasing pretty well. Over time you realize that it also has a place where if it gets overworked, it kind of short circuits and becomes gray. It doesn't go one way or the other and it's a disaster.

The other thing is, we make a lot of studies for all these works because the paper is mounted onto honeycomb aluminum. A six-by-ten foot panel costs over \$3,000, so we try not to make too many mistakes. But we have, and then you have to take the paper off. This wonderful conservator explained how to do it: when you mount paper, you mount paper to paper and then paper to the



Figure 11 (above)

ROBERT LONGO

Untitled (X-Ray of *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*, 1882, After Manet), 2017 (detail of Fig. 26)

Collection of the Artist (© Robert Longo)



Figure 12 (left)

GEORGES SEURAT

Nurse with a Child's Carriage, 1882–84

New York, Morgan Library & Museum

substrate. That way, if a conservator ever needs to save it, they take paper from paper, which is much better than paper from some other surface.

I mean, spraying the works has always been a pain in the ass. Until recently, we would wear hazmat suits and masks and we laid the drawings down so the fixative falls onto the drawing. Be-

Figure 13

AUGUSTE
ALLONGÉ

Pond in the Forest
of Fontainebleau,
1870–98

New York,
Metropolitan
Museum of Art



Figure 14

ROBERT LONGO

Untitled
(Russian Bomb /
Semipalatinsk),
2003

New York, Museum
of Modern Art
(© Robert Longo)



guy wears this oxygen tank, and it's much better that way. But then the problem is that the work has to get framed and it ends up weighing five hundred pounds, which is ridiculous.

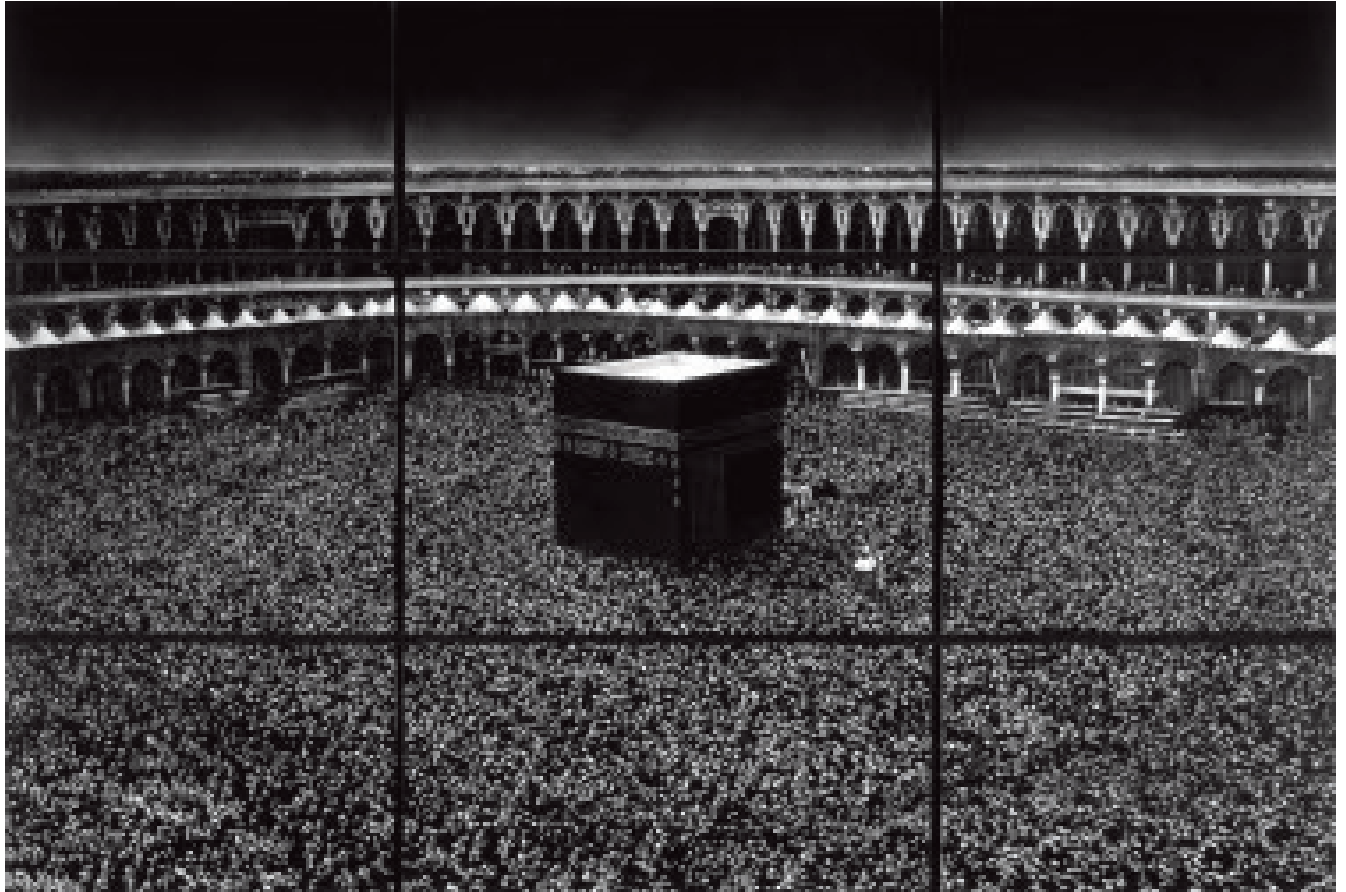
JCA: Going back to what you were just saying about fixatives, I've always been interested in how a lot of these nineteenth-century French *fusainistes* (e.g., Fig. 13)²² would take advantage of how the fixatives would turn the color of their paper brown as an aesthetic bonus.²³ Have you thought about experimenting with fixatives, or is it for you just a final finishing tool?

RL: I hate the word conservative, especially these days, but I am somewhat conservative about the way I deal with this stuff. To me, there seems to be a path that I follow. The fixative I use has stuff called B-72 in it, which is the best. I haven't seen any of my drawings get discolored, unless some idiot puts it in the sunlight. I haven't seen anything really terribly damaged.

I follow this straight rule about how I want to do it. For instance, the drawings are quite beautiful without the glass on them. Sometimes we've created these frames where I can show the drawings without the glass.²⁴ If and when they're sold, the plexiglass goes back on them, and it's the collector that can make the decision. I mean, I advise them not to, but at the same time, the fragility of the work is a problem.

You know, I make these highly aggressive images with dust (e.g., Fig. 14),²⁵ and they're incredibly fragile. I always think, well, maybe I should stop halfway through, it looks kind of cool, but it looks so fucking arty. It's like I'm on a mission with these images and they need to be completed. I don't want to interject so much subjectivity. The subjectivity that's involved in the execution of these drawings is...it's almost like I want them to be behind the scenes. I want them to be buried inside the drawing, not visible.

JCA: Speaking of collections, some of your collectors have expressed preference for your studies because it's seen as more intimate and more au-



tographic.²⁶ Do you see your studies as operating in a different plane than your, let's say, "finished" drawings?

RL: They're a lot fucking smaller. They're a lot smaller. Actually, all the studies are on vellum.²⁷ Occasionally I make small drawings because sometimes an image requires an enormous amount of detail; for instance, an image of the crowd in Mecca (Fig. 15)²⁸ or refugees on a boat.²⁹

We do kind of a full scale, like maybe a forty by sixty-inch section of that drawing to see if we can actually do it. The process is either I want to find an

image, or if there's an image that I see that I want to make. I have this wonderful archivist named Q and he helps me compose the picture with contrast. So, the original source of these works is highly altered, and I try to make the most perfect version of this picture. Then, the execution of the work happens. The study part is critical because the study takes the photographic source image and turns it into my vision, my way of seeing (Fig. 16).³⁰

Sometimes I think what I'm trying to do is reclaim vision back from photography, because I think this is the way that we see. The process is pretty elaborate to finally get to working at the big

Figure 15

ROBERT LONGO

Untitled (Mecca),
2010

Private Collection
(© Robert Longo)

Figure 16

ROBERT LONGO

Untitled (Interior
Front Door with
Bars, 1938), 2000

Vienna, Albertina
(© Robert Longo)



scale—it has to survive a lot of critical criteria and technical aspects. Does it work pictorially? Can we do it technically? We’ve gotten so good at what we do, but still, there are sometimes things that I don’t know if we can do. I’m still a bit suspicious of when we try to do fire (Fig. 17)³¹ or mist.

JCA: What do you think is so hard about fire and mist?

RL: With painting you’re able to create layers. With charcoal, there are a lot of layers, but I’m limited by the palette. It’s very hard to get the complexity of a fire tongue... just the transition from the edge to the center is quite radical. Mist is transparent and with painting, you would apply the mist on top of it. It’s hard to apply mist on top. It’s like when I did the icebergs (e.g., Fig. 18).³² Could I draw white with black? That became the challenge to me. I mean, I’ve done some fires successfully, but generally I tend to kind of stay away from it.

Recently I did a student riot where cops were spraying deer spray at the rioters.³³ The spray looks okay because there’s something behind, some darker surface. But the problem lies with an image of

Figure 17

ROBERT LONGO

Untitled (California
Wildfire), 2019

Private Collection
(© Robert Longo)



Figure 18

ROBERT LONGO

Untitled (Iceberg
for C.D.F.),
2015–16

Private Collection
(© Robert Longo)



spray against the sky. It's really hard to do. The good thing is, I've learned my limitations for sure. The problem for me now is that I've gotten to the point with the drawings where I really want more, and I'm trying to figure out how to get there.

JCA: Earlier in this conversation, you've compared your charcoal drawings to paintings, but I've noticed that throughout past interviews, you've also compared it to sculpture.³⁴ Could you expand more on that concept?

RL: The sculpting part of it has a lot to do with when I say we have to *carve* the image out. The thing is that painting has layers of coverings; drawing is *in* the paper, it's like pressed into the paper. Then you have to carve it out of the paper, so there is that sculptural element to it. It's a lot of work that's just done with your hands, with your fingers and rubbing it in and blending it in, so it has a much more physical aspect than traditional painting.

Also, they feel like they're sculptural in the sense of the scale. I mean, I'm quite envious of painters. Richard Serra (Fig. 19)³⁵ was a bit of a mentor, and he was saying that when he was a young student going to museums in Europe and he saw Caravaggio and Rembrandt and he said, "Fuck, I can't do that. I mean, I got to figure out something else to do." I had the same feeling when I saw all those

great masters: I had to figure out another way to make art and that's how I did it.

JCA: Serra notably once said that "there is no way to make a drawing—there is only drawing."³⁶

RL: Richard and Jackson Pollock are these artists that—for other artists in a weird way—can appear



Figure 19

RICHARD SERRA

Rotation #8, 2011

Art Market (©
Estate of Richard
Serra/Artists Rights
Society [ARS], New
York)

Figure 20

ROBERT LONGO

The Last Flag
(Dedicated to
Howard Zinn),
2015

Private Collection
(© Robert Longo)



as dead ends, because what do you do after them? What do you do after Pollock? What do you do after Serra? And this is where it becomes a case where the artist has to not look at the world to find guidance as to where to go: the experience of work tells you where to go. I find those two artists quite influential for me.

Honestly, I'm tragically a white male and I think somehow, I try to deal with that in my work critically as much as I can. And those two guys are like quintessential white males, you know, aggressive and very American (Fig. 20).³⁷ I mean, I'm tragically an American artist.

JCA: I know that you've translated Pollock's paint-

ings in your Abstract Expressionist series (e.g., Fig. 21),³⁸ and you've previously talked about how you had to apply the different colors and brushstrokes in the same order as Pollock.³⁹ Have you thought about maybe translating some of Richard Serra's large-scale works?

RL: No. No...It's very funny, when I first moved to New York, I wanted to use some grease sticks. And I went to the art supply store, and someone said to me, "No, we don't have any. Serra bought up all the grease stick pencils." Maybe twenty years later, a younger artist told me he went to the art supply store to get some charcoal, and the guy at the store said, "No, we don't have it. Longo bought up all the charcoal." It was the best compliment I've had.

JCA: In a recent conversation with your longtime interviewer Richard Price, you mentioned this idea of "culture of impatience."⁴⁰ Drawing is, as we've discussed, such a patient medium due to its fragility. How do you reconcile this tension?

RL: I think the original performance art is painting, because painting is so time based. You have to deal with drying times, things like that. In classical paintings, they had to paint the sleeve before they could paint the hands...you can see where the paintings are seamed together, where they waited for the work to dry. I don't have to deal with drying time. My work is labor intensive, but if they were paintings, I'm sure they would take like five times longer. My system is more elaborate, it's about building up layers of charcoal.

JCA: But what's after drawing? In a recent interview in *Frieze*, you said that charcoal drawings have sort of run their course for you.⁴¹ Have you thought about experimenting with other media beyond the current return to combines? For instance, your drawings would translate really well into prints, and I know you've experimented with lithography earlier on.

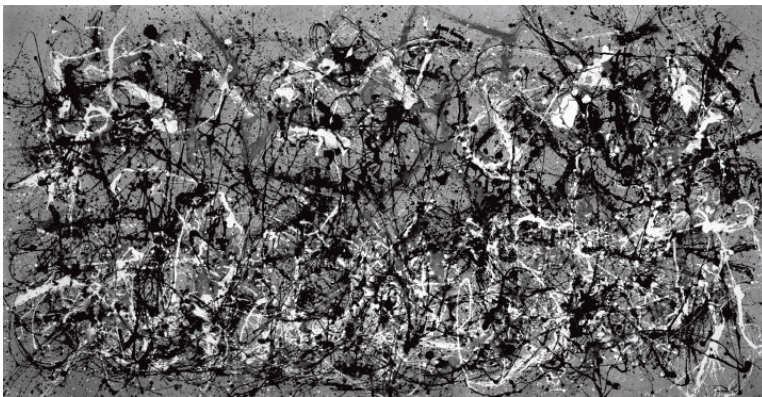
RL: That wasn't so much experimenting. Prints are like making certificates, like stock certificates.

Figure 21

ROBERT LONGO

Untitled (After
Pollock, *Autumn
Rhythm: Number
30*, 1951), 2014

Private Collection
(© Robert Longo)



I'm not a printmaker. I've never messed with the medium too much.

What's happened with the combines (e.g., Fig. 22)⁴² is...going backwards. I found this has happened a couple of times in the history of my work: that for me to go forward, I had to go backwards a little bit. It's like almost needing to get a running start. The combines allow me to do whatever I want; at the same time, they will always be rooted in drawings. The combines kind of have rules to them and one of them is that they will always have a drawing.

So, I will keep drawing, but the thing is, I just want more out of the work. I think younger artists don't realize how much their work actually participates in its own making. You have to listen to your work. My charcoal drawings have been telling me that I have to expand my horizon. At the same time, I don't have to leave them behind. They're the foundation of everything I do. There's this moral imperative that's involved in making these images that are somewhat chronicling the time that we live in. This fucking horrible election that just happened has motivated me more to keep doing what I'm doing.

At the same time, I'm starting to slowly expand it by introducing new elements into the

combines. The show at the Albertina was really very much the past, like almost passing through the past to the present. Milwaukee was very much the present and London was like the future. It was interesting to combine all these things at the same time. Now, I'm open to do whatever I want, which is kind of great. As long as everything is standing on the drawing, because everything starts with drawing.

JCA: It's the origin of the arts.⁴³ Pivoting here to your recourse to art history as a way to comment on the present, how do you decide which themes are worth drawing directly from contemporary photographs and which themes can be mediated only through the past?

RL: I'm always looking for references in archetypes that I can use to understand constructing compositions. I'm looking at art history to find elements that will help me. For instance, when I did this drawing of these three wedding dresses that were all shot with bullet holes in a window in Ukraine (Fig. 23),⁴⁴ it looked like the *Three Graces*. So, I'm always looking for those kinds of ancient archetypes.

Figure 22

ROBERT LONGO

Untitled (Pilgrim),
2024

Private Collection
(© Robert Longo)



Figure 23

ROBERT LONGO

Untitled (The Three Graces; Donetsk, Ukraine; March 14, 2022), 2022

Milwaukee, Art Museum (© Robert Longo)



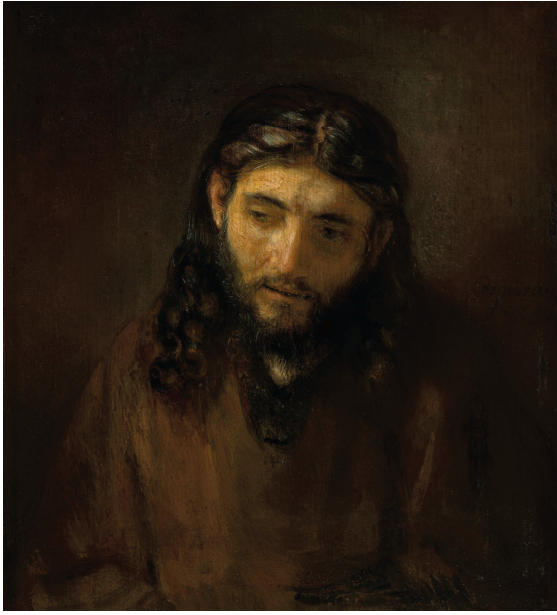
At the same time, I had seen this show in Paris of Rembrandt's paintings of *Young Jesus* (Fig. 24).⁴⁵ They were exquisitely beautiful paintings. I bought the catalogue when I got home, and in the back of the catalogue were these x-rays. At first, I read the essay about how when Rembrandt was making these paintings, Amsterdam was an open city for Jews and he got young Jewish men to pose for these pictures of Jesus. But I looked at the paintings, and the paintings don't look terribly Semitic. They look more like Northern Europeans. In the x-rays (e.g., Fig. 25),⁴⁶ in the paintings underneath, the figures were very Semitic looking.

They also happened to be on this wood grain, which made it look like a picture out of *The Matrix*, like electricity running through it. I contacted the restorer who was also the curator of the show, and I went to see him in Philadelphia. What was interesting was that x-rays are a lot like my drawings, because where there is white, there's nothing, you know what I mean? It just is a perfect translation to my medium. So, I started drawing those. It was kind of a forensic analysis of paintings.

The AbEx things...around the time when I did them, I think Mitt Romney was running against Obama for president. There seemed to be an enormous amount of younger artists making all this terrible abstract art that looked like representations of abstract art. It was very anti-political, anti-intellectual, and highly process-oriented. I thought, maybe I should go back and look at the original abstract art. What's great as an American artist is that the first great American art trend was Abstract Expressionism. So, I went back to analyze and learn from them and got permission from all the estates and access to the paintings and the photographs.

When we made the drawings, we used color photographs. It was a way of learning how these guys did this. I mean it's interesting, the idea of how long it takes to draw a brushstroke versus how long it takes to *make* a brushstroke. Big difference.

JCA: I believe the x-ray series was called *Hungry Ghosts* (e.g., Fig. 26).⁴⁷ How do you come up with some of your titles?



RL: I like the way that it sounds, or they're misunderstandings. There's a Pink Floyd song, "With Quiet Desperation," and I was trying to remember it and instead came up with "Luminous Discontent." I mean, titles, they're interesting to me, but they're not that important.... Art doesn't necessarily need titles.

JCA: I'd like to wrap up with how you have described your work in the past as "romantic."⁴⁸ That strikes me as a term that has a long historical lineage. Can you unpack your definition of romantic, if you still would describe your work that way?

RL: I view history. Imagine a timeline and there's this wheel that is rotating on the timeline. I think as an artist, this wheel has three points on it. One is formalism, one is romanticism, and the other one is mannerism. When you're a younger artist, you're in that formal stage and you really want to express what you're doing and try to figure out the way it's going to look. As this wheel starts to rotate, you start to go into your romantic stage, which is the point when you get really good at what you're doing, and you can really load it with content.



Figure 24 (top left)

REMBRANDT
VAN RIJN

Head of Christ,
c. 1648–56

Philadelphia,
Philadelphia
Museum of Art

Figure 25 (above)

ROBERT LONGO

Untitled (X-Ray
of Head of Christ),
c. 1648–56, After
Rembrandt), 2015

Collection of the
Artist (© Robert
Longo)



Figure 26

ROBERT LONGO

Untitled (X-Ray
of A Bar at the
Folies-Bergère, 1882,
After Manet), 2017

Collection of the
Artist (© Robert
Longo)

As the wheel keeps rotating, you get into the most dangerous zone, which is mannerism, which is where you get spectacularly good at what you do, but you forget why you did it in the first place and you get lost. I try to avoid being manneristic with my work, but I realized that one needs to go through mannerism to get back to formalism, to start the cycle over again. This rotation, I think happens in culture, it happens in history, and it happens to me as an artist, for sure.

I think right now I'm very close to becoming manneristic with my work. But I'm understanding

that and I'm trying to get myself out of it by going back to the combines, which are to me at this point now, very formal.

J. Cabelle Ahn is an independent art historian and writer based in New York.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

The interviewer extends her gratitude to Robert Longo, Alex Baye at Longo's studio, Nina Sandhaus and Sarah Rustin at Thaddaeus Ropac, and the editors at *Master Drawings*.

NOTES

1. Charcoal and graphite; 2438 x 1524 mm; see www.robertlongo.com/series/menintheicity/. IMAGE: Courtesy of the artist.
2. See Douglas Crimp, *Pictures*, exh. cat., New York, Artists Space, 1977.
3. See Heather Peasanti, ed., *Wish You Were Here: Buffalo Avant-Garde in the 1970s*, Buffalo, 2012, pp. 82–100; and Linda L. Cathcart, ed., *Hallwalls: 5 Years*, Buffalo, 1980.
4. New York, Museum of Modern Art, inv. no. 269.1983.a–b (Gift of the Louis and Bessie Adler Foundation, Inc., Seymour M. Klein, President). Lacquer on wood; charcoal, graphite, and ink, on mounted paper; 2600 x 2286 x 927 mm; see www.moma.org/collection/works/79338#main. IMAGE: Courtesy of the artist with cooperation by Thaddaeus Ropac.
5. Figure 3: *Untitled (Dirty Boy)*, 2021 (charcoal, on mounted paper; 2134 x 3213 mm; see www.emergentmag.com/interviews/robert-longo). Figure 4: *Untitled (Riot Cops)*, 2016 (charcoal, on mounted paper; 2565 x 3556 mm; see www.metropictures.com/artists/robert-longo/images?view=slider#8). IMAGES: Courtesy of the artist with cooperation by Thaddaeus Ropac.
6. See Paul Fréart de Chantelou, *Journal du voyage en France du cavalier Bernin*, New York, 1972, p. 28. For a reference to Stendhal's account of Michelangelo (1475–1564) visiting Daniele da Volterra (1509–1566), see Jean-Luc Nancy, *Pleasure in Drawing*, New York, 2013, p. 106.
7. For examples, see Alexander Ferrando et al., *Gang of Cosmos: The Abstract Expressionist Drawings*, exh. cat., New York, Metro Pictures, and Petzel Gallery, 2014 (published Berlin, 2017), pp. 82–89, repr. (in color).
8. The referenced exhibitions are Robert Longo, *Gang of Cosmos*, New York, Metro Pictures, 2014; and idem, *The New Beyond*, Paris, Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac, 2022.
9. Graphite and charcoal; 189 x 175 mm; see www.hallartfoundation.org/exhibition/robert-longo/artworks/slideshow#2. IMAGE: Courtesy of the artist.
10. For more on the *Heritage* series, see Kate Fowle et al., *Proof: Francisco Goya, Sergei Eisenstein, Robert Longo*, exh. cat., Moscow, Garage Museum of Contemporary Art, and elsewhere, 2016–17, p. 63; and Hal Foster et al., *Robert Longo: Charcoal*, exh. cat., Ulm, Kunsthalle Weishaupt, 2010–11, pp. 213–14.
11. Figure 7: Charcoal, on mounted paper; 2619 x 1524 mm; see www.robertlongo.com/series/abex. IMAGE: Courtesy the artist and Thaddaeus Ropac.
12. In 1972 Longo studied conservation at the Accademia di Belle Arti in Florence; see Howard N. Fox et al., *Robert Longo*, exh. cat., Los Angeles, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and elsewhere, 1989, p. 171.
13. Charcoal and ink, on mounted paper; 2235 x 1778 mm; see www.robertlongo.com/series/ophelia. IMAGE: Courtesy of the artist.
14. Charcoal, on mounted paper; 2743 x 4572 mm; see <https://kunst-und-natur.de/kuenstler/longo-robert>. IMAGE: Courtesy of the artist with cooperation by Thaddaeus Ropac.
15. See John Berger, *Berger on Drawing*, Cork, 2005, p. 17. For Longo's references to Berger in other interviews, see the following: Amanda Gluibizzi, "Robert Longo with Amanda Gluibizzi," *The Brooklyn Rail*, October 2024 (online at www.brooklynrail.org/2024/10/art/robert-longo-with-amanda-gluibizzi); and Tom Morton, "Robert Longo: 'Montage Is a Way of Living,'" *Frieze*, 1 October 2024 (online at www.frieze.com/article/robert-longo-interview-2024).
16. The exhibition featured over 100 works by twenty-six artists; see Robert Longo and Charles Clough, *Working on Paper: Developing the Idea*, exh. cat., Buffalo, Hallwalls, 1975 (online at www.hallwalls.org/visual/241.html).
17. See Timothy Mayhew, "Dessin au fusain: Nineteenth-century Charcoal Drawing Materials and Techniques," in Lee Hendrix et al., *Noir: The Romance of Black in Nineteenth-century French Drawings and Prints*, exh. cat., Los Angeles, J. Paul Getty Museum, 2016, pp. 125–52.
18. See Robert Longo, "Foreword," in Foster 2010–11, p. 7.
19. Charcoal, on mounted paper; 1778 x 3048 mm; see www.artbasel.com/catalog/artwork/38219/Robert-Longo-Untitled-Gabriel-s-Wing?lang=en. IMAGE: Courtesy of the artist.
20. Charcoal, on mounted paper; 2618 x 3488 mm; see <https://ropac.net/artists/56-robert-longo/works/9422/>. IMAGE: Courtesy of the artist and Thaddaeus Ropac.
21. New York, Morgan Library & Museum, inv. no. 1997.89 (Thaw Collection). Black conté crayon; 320 x 248 mm; see Colin B. Bailey et al., *Drawn to Greatness: Master Drawings from the Thaw Collection*, exh. cat., New York, Morgan Library & Museum, 2017, no. 358, repr. (in color); and www.themorgan.org/drawings/item/110071.
22. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, inv. no. 2023.381 (Purchase: Friends of Drawings and Prints Gifts, 2023). Charcoal; 700 x 1000 mm; see www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/898707.
23. See Michelle Sullivan and Nancy Yocco, "Diversity and Complexity of Black Drawing Media: Four Case Studies," in Hendrix et al. 2016, pp. 118–20.
24. See Olivia Murphy et al., *Luminous Discontent*, exh. cat., Paris, Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac, 2016, p. 22.
25. New York, Museum of Modern Art, inv. no. 2252.2005 (The Judith Rothschild Foundation Contemporary Drawings Collection Gift). Charcoal, on mounted pa-

- per; 2438 x 1778 mm; see www.moma.org/collection/works/96559. IMAGE: Courtesy of the artist.
26. See Elsy Lahner et al., *A Passion for Drawing: The Guerlain Collection from the Centre Pompidou*, exh. cat., Vienna, Albertina, 2019–20, pp. 13–14.
 27. For an example, see Robert Longo, *Study of The Thinker (Rodin's Gates of Hell)*, 2018 (ink and charcoal, on vellum; 343 x 533 mm), see <https://ropac.net/artists/73-robert-rauschenberg-foundation/works/13448-robert-longo-study-of-the-thinker-rodin-doors-2018>. For other examples of Longo's studies, see *ibid.*, pp. 70–71, repr. (in color).
 28. Charcoal, on mounted paper, nine panels; 4216 x 6401 mm; see www.robertlongo.com/series/godmachines. IMAGE: Courtesy of the artist and Thaddaeus Ropac.
 29. See Robert Longo, *Untitled (Refugees of Mediterranean Sea, Sub-Saharan Migrants, July 25, 2017)*, 2018 (charcoal, on mounted paper; 2464 x 3048 mm); see www.robertlongo.com/series/destroyercycle.
 30. Charcoal, on mounted paper; 2438 x 1524 mm; see www.robertlongo.com/series/freud/. IMAGE: Courtesy of the artist.
 31. Ink and charcoal, on canvas; 418 x 835 mm; see <https://jonathangriffin.org/2021/01/21/robert-longo/>. IMAGE: Courtesy of the artist.
 32. Charcoal, on mounted paper; 3048 x 5105 mm; see <https://ropac.net/artists/56-robert-longo/works/9524>. IMAGE: Courtesy of the artist and Thaddaeus Ropac.
 33. For an example, see Robert Longo, *Untitled (Ferguson Police, August 13, 2014)*, 2014, in the Broad, Los Angeles (inv. no. F-LONG-2015.001; charcoal, on mounted paper; 2184 x 3048 mm); see www.thebroad.org/art/robert-longo/untitled-ferguson-police-august-13-2014.
 34. See Richard Price and Robert Longo, *Men in the Cities, 1979–1982*, New York, 1986, p. 95; Renate Wiehager et al., *Andy Warhol*, exh. cat., Berlin, Daimler Art Collection, 2002, p. 75; and Eliza Goodpasture, “Seven Questions with Robert Longo,” *Art UK*, 11 October 2024 (online at www.ropac.net/news/2072-seven-questions-with-robert-longo-an-interview).
 35. Paintstick, on handmade paper; 806 x 597 mm; see www.christies.com/en/private-sales/privateitems/Rotation-8-SN00620654-001. IMAGE: Robert McKeever.
 36. Richard Serra in an interview from 1977. Quoted in Pamela M. Lee, “Some Kinds of Duration: The Temporality of Drawing as Process Art,” in Cornelia H. Butler, *Afterimage*, Los Angeles, 1999, p. 25.
 37. Charcoal, on mounted paper; 2438 x 2438 mm; see www.robertlongo.com/series/protocolverso/. IMAGE: Courtesy of the artist.
 38. Charcoal on mounted paper; 2318 x 4572 mm; see www.robertlongo.com/series/abex. IMAGE: Courtesy of the artist and Thaddaeus Ropac.
 39. See Ben Luke, “Podcast | A Brush with...Robert Longo,” *The Art Newspaper*, 25 September 2024 (online at www.theartnewspaper.com/2024/09/25/podcast-%7C-a-brush-with-robert-longo).
 40. See Richard Price, “‘How Do You Feel about Getting Old?’: Robert Longo in Conversation with Richard Price,” *Interview*, 8 October 2024 (online at www.interviewmagazine.com/art/robert-longo-in-conversation-with-richard-price).
 41. See Morton 2024.
 42. Charcoal, on mounted paper; video monitor, steel frame; 3D print; patinated cast resin, and dye sublimation print; five parts: 2235 x 7500 x 152 mm; see <https://ropac.net/online-exhibitions/176-robert-longo-searchers>.
 43. See Fowle et al. 2016–17, p. 38.
 44. Milwaukee Art Museum, inv. no. M2024.53a–c. Charcoal, on mounted paper; each panel 2438 x 1245 mm; see <https://mam.org/exhibitions/acceleration-of-history/#art-works>. IMAGE: Courtesy of the artist.
 45. Philadelphia Museum of Art, inv. no. 480 (John G. Johnson Collection, 1917; oil on panel, laid into a larger panel; 35.8 x 31.2 cm; see Lloyd DeWitt et al., *Rembrandt and the Face of Jesus*, exh. cat., Philadelphia, Philadelphia Museum of Art, and elsewhere, 2011–12; and <https://philamuseum.org/collection/object/102264>).
 46. Charcoal, on mounted paper; 2242 x 1778 mm; see www.robertlongo.com/series/hungryghosts. IMAGE: Courtesy of the artist with the cooperation of Thaddaeus Ropac.
 47. See Note 20.
 48. See Howard N. Fox, “In Civil War,” in *idem* et al. 1989, p. 13.