

Artist Resource – Robert Longo (American, b. 1953)

[Robert Longo artist website: biography, press, artwork, writing.](#)

Longo at the [Metro Pictures Gallery, New York.](#)

Longo at [Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac.](#)

[Oral history](#) with the Smithsonian Archives of American Art, conducted in 2009.

In 2010, the [Museu Coleção Berardo in Lisbon, Portugal](#) traced the trajectory of Longo’s career with a major retrospective featuring his most iconic work.

“Art is a form of understanding, like philosophy and science and sociology...and I think art has the capacity to hold all those things and it may be one of the few things that maybe can help people understand the contemporary condition better than anything else,” Longo explains in a [video interview](#) at Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac in 2014, in conjunction with his exhibition [Furies, Beast, and Servants](#).

In 2014, Longo embarked on [Gang of Cosmos](#), twelve charcoal translations of Abstract Expressionist paintings, including Jackson Pollock, Helen Frankenthaler, Robert Motherwell, and Joan Mitchell. Working directly with the museums where the original work is housed, Longo took photographs and rendered each colorful canvas in black and white. Longo discusses his process in a [video interview](#) filmed at the [Metro Pictures Gallery](#).

[Musée Magazine interviewed Longo](#) in 2016 about the themes of scientific progress, violence, and beauty in his work, and the value of influence and reproduction.



Longo in his New York studio, 2011; Photograph: Brock Enright

Art critic and theorist Hal Foster [interviewed Longo in 2017](#) at the Brooklyn Museum, in conjunction with the collective exhibition, [Proof: Francisco Goya, Sergei Eisenstein, Robert Longo](#), which Longo helped develop. About the visual intensity of his drawings, Longo explains, “There’s an urgency in what I see in the world and the work that I’m doing. Maybe I’m ripping these chunks of things out and shoving them in your face and saying *look at this*. There is a sense of urgency in saying look at these images and look at the world you live in. Don’t let it pass by you for a split second in a newspaper and then forget.”

On the occasion of his [first solo exhibition in London](#), *Studio International* [spoke with Longo](#) about the medium of charcoal, working with art historical sources, and political engagement as an artist. “I think making art in general is a political statement, whether abstract expressionism or pictures of...daisies. It is a freedom of expression.”

In April 2020, the Hall Art Foundation in Schloss Derneburg, Germany was scheduled to open [When Heaven and Hell Change Places](#), featuring Longo’s quintessential charcoal drawings, cast aluminum reliefs, and a monumental sculptural installation from which the exhibition gets its name.



Longo, 2016
Photograph: Andrea Blanch

On view May 28 – August 30, 2020



Robert Longo (American, b. 1953)
Men in the Cities, 1979-80
 Charcoal and graphite on paper

Private Collection, Los Angeles; L2019:160.3

Robert Longo became a fixture of contemporary American art after participating in the famed 1977 *Pictures* show in New York, where he received critical accolades for an enamel aluminum relief based on a dying man in the film *The American Soldier* (1970). The ambiguity of the sculpture's movement intrigued exhibition viewers from the New York art world, prompting Longo's production of what remains his most celebrated series: *Men in the Cities*. The larger-than-life-size drawings – a selection of three is seen here – began as photographs taken by Longo on the roof of his Manhattan apartment. He recruited friends such as fellow *Pictures* photographer Cindy Sherman, and Larry Gagosian, founder of the Gagosian Gallery, as his subjects and captured their instinctual bodily reactions as he threw objects in their direction. Longo then projected the images onto large sheets of paper and reproduced each figure in charcoal and graphite, creating stark black and white echoes of the original color photographs. The finished drawings blur the line between constructed and candid, movement and stillness, while translating the energetic nuance and expressive potential of the human form.

Extra Resources

[Men in Cities series](#)

Longo reflects on the inspiration for *Men in Cities* in a [video interview](#)



On view July 15 – October 18, 2020

Robert Longo (American, b. 1953)

Untitled (Red Sea), 2009

Charcoal on mounted paper

Private Collection, Los Angeles; L2019:155.2

Robert Longo's innovative multi-media practice speaks to a diverse set of art historical, social, and political influences, a life-long interest in how pictures mediate experience of the world, and his conviction that an artist's "job is to deal with and tell the truth." Since discovering his affection for art while studying restoration and conservation in Florence in 1972, he has moved fluidly between painting, photography, film, sculpture, and drawing. Longo's mature work centers around what he refers to as "charcoal regeneration," in which he reproduces and enhances photographs through the monochrome mediums of charcoal and graphite to reach what he sees as the purest form of visual truth: a black and white image. **Untitled (Red Sea)** comes from Longo's *Monsters* series, inspired by days teaching his son how to surf. Longo captures the power, precision, physicality, and elemental beauty of the ocean, emphasizing the peak moment of drama and mythic, absolute force of nature.

Extra Resources

Longo's [Monsters series](#)