

# ROBERT LONGO'S ARCHAEOLOGICAL SENSIBILITY



An exhibition of works by Robert Longo at Louisiana Museum of Modern Art [[Link](#)].





Raft at Sea 2016-17

Longo traces photographs in charcoal. Large scale charcoal drawings. Of photographs. Blow-ups – upscaled photographs – traced projections.



Iceberg for C.D.F (Caspar David Friedrich), 2015-16; The Western Wall, 2011  
(Jerusalem)

Stand back and you see the BIG PICTURE. Look closely and it dissolves into powdered carbon. Media alchemy.



Prisoners, Kandahar Airport 2016 (infrared photograph)

I particularly liked the redrawing of a series of photographs of Sigmund Freud's consulting rooms in Vienna, as he fled Vienna in 1938.



View of Study Room with Books, Desk and Window, 1938, 2002



Study for Open Door to Consulting Room 1938, 2000

An eclectic mix of subjects. A consistency of medium.

## An archaeological sensibility – working with (media) remains.

Longo's drawings operate as time-thickened images—excavated from the flat immediacy of the photograph and raised to monumental scale, they stage an archaeological confrontation with the media fragment as both residue and specter.

They enact an archaeological sensibility by transforming ephemeral media fragments into monumental, almost sculptural presences. In scaling up the photographic trace, he does not simply reproduce but re-mediate, excavating from the surface of the image its latent historical and emotional intensity. The act of translation—from photograph to drawing, from instant to duration, from soft pixel to dense gesture—performs a temporal dilation. We zoom in to examine the granular detail of graphite on paper, and zoom out to confront the enormity of cultural memory. What was once instantaneous—the click of a shutter capturing a moment from war, protest, spectacle—is slowed and monumentalized, acquiring the aura of the ruin, the relic, the icon.

### **Temporal tension**

Longo freezes time while also invoking it—his images are past moments (actualities), yet rendered so forcefully that they press into the present. They are **anachronistic** in Walter Benjamin's sense: past moments charged with present urgency.

### **Material remediation**

Charcoal, a primal, earthy medium, contrasts with the dematerialized nature of digital or photographic imagery. This recalls the **archaeologist's labor**—hands-on, dirty, meticulous—transforming the clean record of a media image into a site of tactile encounter.

### **Scale as temporal depth**

By enlarging fragments (a falling body, a protester, an atomic explosion), Longo makes them monumental—not unlike how archaeology might elevate a potsherd or coin into a key to a civilization. The shift in scale **invites reverence**, and

simultaneously **disorients**—an effect akin to Susan Stewart’s notion of the **gigantic** as the sublime reverse of the miniature.

### **The parallax of media memory**

Viewers are drawn into Longo’s images with the **parallax vision** of contemporary spectatorship: we know the source is photographic, yet what we see is hand-rendered. This double vision (mechanical/human, indexical/expressive) stages a **temporal and media disjunction**, like the archaeological sensibility’s constant negotiation between evidence and imagination, documentation and reconstruction.



Copenhagen, February 14, 2015, 2017

Photograph of bullet holes in window of Krudttønden cultural centre, Copenhagen

Swedish cartoonist Lars Vilks had been the subject of death threats from Islamic

extremists in the wake of the controversy over his drawings of Muhammad in 2007. On February 14 2015 at 15:00 an event titled "Art, Blasphemy and Freedom of Expression" (*Kunst, blasfemi og ytringsfrihed*) took place at the center. The debate, organized by the Lars Vilks Committee, was scheduled to include discussion on the attack in January 2015 against the French satirical weekly *Charlie Hebdo*. At least 30 shots were fired at the gathering, killing four people. The gunman was later identified as Omar Abdel Hamid El-Hussein.

Transcriptions of paintings –



After Jorn; Letter to My Son 1956-57, 2022



After Turner; The Slave Ship 1840, 2017