

ARTS

## ART IN REVIEW

By GRACE GLUECK DEC. 12, 1997

Robert Longo

'Magellan Series'

Metro Pictures

519 West 24th Street

Chelsea

Through Jan. 10

Never one to shirk excess, Robert Longo has filled the capacious Metro Pictures gallery from floor to ceiling with 366 black-and-white drawings, one for every day of the calendar and a leap year bonus, yet.

The 19th-century salon-style arrangement is a bit of a turnaround for an artist of such contemporary subject matter, who previously expressed yuppie angst in powerful large-scale sculptures and drawings. But like his earlier work, this mammoth miscellany of drawings -- each the size of a television screen -- is dominated by here-and-now content. Motifs from film, advertising and other media prevail, along with images of rock stars and concerts, sports heroes, the artist's family, politicians, news events, animals and landscapes.

There is a certain stun factor in this immense array of tedious visual chatter, which is said to represent Mr. Longo's "personal and cultural environment." In 1996, after finishing his highly collaborative film "Johnny Mnemonic," the artist -- experiencing sensory overload -- worked alone in his studio to get it all down in pen and charcoal. There's almost nothing a tuned-in baby boomer could think of that's not represented here: Malcolm X, the expressive countenance of Peter Gabriel, the stylized face of a cosmetics model, Elvis Presley gyrating, the wreckage of an airline, the skulls of victims of the Pol Pot regime in Cambodia. There is also the Brooklyn Bridge, a fierce tiger's head and the mask of Tutankhamen -- but enough already. I don't want to spoil the plot.

These staccato, rat-a-tat drawings, many prompted by photographs, are placed in no particular hierarchy. Does this reflect the mindlessness of media bombardment? Mr. Longo's skilled draftsmanship is evident here, but the murky quality of many of the drawings, perhaps intentional, gives them the look of photocopied documents or black-and-white television images. It's almost as if you turned on your pre-color set and let it drone on for a day or two. GRACE GLUECK