



## IN PRINT



## ARCHIVE

- March 2017
- February 2017
- January 2017
- December 2016
- November 2016
- October 2016
- September 2016

[All back issues](#)



## Francisco Goya, Sergei Eisenstein, and Robert Longo

GARAGE MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART



View of "Proof: Francisco Goya, Sergei Eisenstein, Robert Longo," 2016–17. Center: Robert Longo, *Untitled (Pentecost)*, 2016. Right: Robert Longo, *Untitled (Guernica Redacted, After Picasso's Guernica, 1937)*, 2014.

Francisco Goya, Sergei Eisenstein, and Robert Longo are the three diverse artists compared in "Proof," curated by Kate Fowle of the Garage Museum of Contemporary Art in collaboration with Longo. The trio are linked by the idea of historical witness and by influence: Eisenstein looked back to Goya, and Longo has made drawings of images from both.

The display of seven of Eisenstein's films is unforgettable. Remastered, digitized versions are projected in slow motion, frame by frame, in a wall-filling frieze (with obvious debt to Douglas Gordon). The effect is both mesmerizing and disruptive. Showing *October (Ten Days That Shook the World)* (1928) in this way obscures the original montage cutting and silences Shostakovich's tempestuous sound track. Whether this neutralizes the meaning of the film or intensifies its effect is a matter of opinion. For me, it's both: *October* is no longer revolutionary, *Alexander Nevsky* (1938) no longer Stalinist propaganda; we are left with Eisenstein's pictorial and compositional brilliance, which is also reflected in a group of storyboard drawings on display nearby.

Works from all four of Goya's large print portfolios, on loan from the State Central Museum of Contemporary History of Russia, in Moscow, are displayed in an octagonal pavilion within the galleries. By contrast with Eisenstein's films and Longo's drawings, they are small-scale and literary, with a delicacy of touch. Goya's depictions of the atrocities and absurdities of war, and of the various stages of the bullfight, combine fantasy and reportage with a caustic directness. They highlight the lack of irony and satire in Longo's and Eisenstein's artworks, which are rooted in the epic rather than cabinet-scale imagery.

Finally, an extensive selection of drawings by Longo provides a survey of his work over the last fourteen years. Whatever their subject, they have one thing in common: the charcoal with which they are made. Monolithic, thick-framed vitrines around the exhibition hold monochrome, charcoal-covered sheets. Longo has pointed out that of the three artists exhibited, he is the most retrograde in terms of technology, employing a substance—burnt wood—that was among the first mediums used by early hominids to make drawings.

Longo's development of his technique is impressive, whether pushing for extremes of Photorealism in his super-high-resolution drawing of a football player, or setting himself ever-more-challenging tasks—for example, his transcriptions of Abstract Expressionist paintings, in which a repertoire of mark-making conveys differences in color and texture. Subjects range from the Kaaba at Mecca to a bullet hole in a *Charlie Hebdo* office window, from light shimmering on water to American fighter jets, all executed with the same level of intensity. A sense of brutality lies at the heart of Longo's approach to historical witness. His 2014 reproduction of Picasso's epic *Guernica*, 1937, one of the most stirring works in the exhibition, is interrupted by black bands that add an extra dimension of horror to the image, compounded by the gruesome detail of bullet holes in the drawing itself. Though not explained by the gallery label, the work was shot while on display in Ohio last year, before the attacker turned the gun on himself.

This brutality, at least in mediated form, runs throughout Longo's work. But what does it prove? What history does his work witness? Images are historical "proof," to quote the exhibition's title, only indirectly. The most recent drawing on view, *Untitled (Pentecost)*, 2016, shows a large robot, taken from the sci-fi film *Pacific Rim* (2013), striding menacingly through a ruined city, based on photographs of the carnage in Syria. Whether the drawing shows Aleppo—where a humanitarian crisis is unfolding as I write—is not clear. Yet alongside Goya and Eisenstein, the hypermediated, highly evasive nature of Longo's charcoal Photorealism becomes evident, proving, if anything, that history resides not in subject matter but in the work of art itself.

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