

METRO PICTURES

Indrisek, Scott. "Robert Longo's 'Amerika' Is One Frightening Place to Live," *Garage.Vice.com* (April 25, 2019).

GARAGE



Death Star 2018, 2018, approximately 40,000 inert bullets (brass, copper, lead) welded to the frame; steel I-beams; steel chain, 254 1/2 x 254 1/2 x 144 inches (overall), 646.4 x 646.4 x 365.8 cm, 77 inches (sphere diameter) 195.6 cm.

Robert Longo wants his work to be like “a headbutt, a kick in the balls, and a punch in the face.” If you can’t tell, the New York artist—now 66—is a little frustrated with the state of the world. For the past few years his enormous and labor-intensive graphite drawings have memorialized snippets of a chaotic news cycle, from riot cops to protesting football players. His latest show, “Amerika,” opening tonight at Metro Pictures, centers on one of many American problems—gun violence—in the form of a massive, 1.5-ton metal sphere whose surface is covered with some 40,000 30 caliber bullets. The piece, which Longo admits has a bit of a sinister disco-ball vibe to it, aims to raise both awareness and money; 20% of the sale of the work, which is priced at \$1.5 million, will go to the charity Everytown for Gun Safety.



Untitled (White House), 2019, charcoal on mounted paper, 96 x 280 inches (overall image), 243.8 x 711.2 cm, installation view, Metro Pictures, New York, 2019.

This isn't the first time Longo has made a sculpture like this; he created a smaller version back in 1993. But the new iteration—*Death Star 2018*—has swollen in step with the prolific number of gun deaths in the United States. It's stunning and imposing, an elegant and minimalist retort to national trauma. "How do you make horrible things beautiful?" Longo ponders, recognizing that it's an age-old question—from Caravaggio's *David with the Head of Goliath* to Géricault's *The Raft of the Medusa*.

An adjoining room at the gallery is given over to a single triptych drawing, depicting the White House as seen from the vantage of an imaginary sink hole on the property's front lawn. The stately building rises up ominously, surrounded by bare trees. Oddly enough, the foreboding landscape elements in the work were inspired by a scene from Disney's *Snow White*. Longo gets up close to the surface, pointing at one of the White House's windows, where Trump—or at least his stomach—is vaguely visible. There's not much action in the scene, but it's that very sense of stillness that is most unnerving. Who knows what the man is getting up to inside—starting a casual nuclear war with North Korea? Hate-tweeting at *Morning Joe*?



Icarus Rising, 2019, single channel video projection with sound, duration: 9'44", installation view, Metro Pictures, New York, 2019.

Lest anyone think that Longo is simply making pictures about how fucked we all are, he acknowledges that many of our problems do have political remedies. “There are solutions, I don’t want to be a Debbie Downer,” he says. And in some ways, he’s been through something like this before. “I grew up as an artist, with Reagan in the 1980s,” Longo adds. “Reagan is the original Trump, the guy who said ‘make America great again.’” (To be fair, though, many have made the point that certain policies promoted by Reagan would make him too left-leaning for the contemporary Republican machine.)

The most unexpected work in “Amerika”—and the one that feels closest to an actual slow-motion punch in the face—is a roughly 10-minute film, *Icarus Rising*, which was born out of the masses of news images that Longo had stored in his studio. To create the work, he simply filmed himself tearing apart pictures of Sean Hannity, refugees, Stormy Daniels, Jamal Khashoggi, Vladimir Putin, and that Trump tweet where he spells hamburgers as “hamberders.” The resulting black-and-white footage is slowed down considerably, the sounds of ripping paper transformed into a beastly, underwater roar.

“Amerika” is somewhat of a precursor or introduction to a follow-up exhibition that Longo will have at Metro Pictures this November. That show will include an array of “heavy, heavy drawings,” he says, with subjects ranging from migrant caravans to anti-Semitic graffiti attacks. There’ll be a “little bit of hope,” he adds, in the form of a work depicting the white-clad congresswomen who stood (and danced) in solidarity at the last State of the Union address. “This,” he said, nodding toward the drawing of the White House currently hanging in the gallery, “is going to look like a postcard from Miami compared to what’s going to come in November.”