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Introduction

My interest to research Robert Longo developed over a year ago after reading a magazine called Film Comment in which I came across an article entitled *Bravo, Borrowed Images* by Marlaine Glicksman. What caught my attention was a quote she chose to highlight at the beginning of the article which read "Important art always has something to do with hot-wiring the culture of the time" 1. I proceeded to read on. She gives a brief description of a series of drawings by Robert Longo called Men in the Cities, which mean't nothing to me at the time. She then gives an account of his involvement in music video production, I was most impressed to discover that he directed the video for "Bizarre Love Triangle" by New Order, an English pop group that had much meaning for me as a teenager. Again she mentions Men in the Cities and how the imagery for the video had come directly from this series of drawings. It lead me to read more into Longo's work, I wanted to know more about his Men in the Cities and his work prior to that and that of other artists in the late seventies and early eighties such as Jack Goldstein and David Byrne. I realised the more I read, that the most interesting and engaging art for me, surfaced in New York in the seventies and was produced by a generation who nearly all arrived in the city from elsewhere around 1975. These artists inherited the title NeoPop or New pop, as they developed their work in a similar fashion to the Pop artists in the sixties with their close involvement with the media, but their work was far more diverse in style and meaning.

In this thesis I discuss the development of Pop art in the sixties and how it moved the concept of art out of the modernist era and into a post modernist era, and the development of the NeoPop style in 1970's New York with the introduction of Robert Longo. In the mid seventies artists began to converge art and entertainment to seek a wider audience. Andy Warhol was the first to introduce a multimedia art performance show combining art and entertainment with a group called the Velvet underground. In the seventies the artists themselves began to headline the clubscene. Robert Longo and David Byrne are two of these artists who formed artbands, David Byrne belonged to a group called Talking Heads and Longo's group were called Menthol Wars. David Byrne remained in the entertainment industry whereas Longo moved back to the artscene after a time. If one looks carefully at Men in the Cities, one will notice how similar the gestures in his drawings are to David Byrnes new wave performances on stage.

Television and cinema had a profound influence on Longo's artmaking career, in particular the films of Andy Warhol and R.W Fassbinder. In 1977, Longo used a still image from one of Fassbinders movies called "An American Soldier" which marked the beginning of his career. He recreated this still image of the actor in pose, in alluminium, it was a piece which led to the development of his "Men in the Cities" series. I discuss the aspect of manneristic violence in his work which was directly inspired by the Fassbinders films. He was fascinated to watch the way people would die in the movies, one could say that that is exactly what "Men in the Cities" is, still shots from his own imaginary movie.

I intend to discuss the close relationship between NeoPop art and sixteenth centuary Mannerism in Florence and Rome, Italy. There are many similarities between the figurative gestures in "Men in the Cities" and the figurative gestures in Mannerist paintings. Gesture is not the only similarity between, 20th centuary America and 16th century Italy. Both centuries witnessed a disintegrated society and the alienation of the individual. There was a similar atmosphere in each century which seemed to inspire artists to produce similar art forms. I will give a brief description of Longo's education and the how the after effects of the Vietnam war left a mark of disillusionment and alienation with him and his generation. I see a link between these feelings, the Fassbinder movies, in particular "An American Soldier" and the production of " Men in the Cities ", alienation being the key word for discussion.

Chapter 1. <u>Historical Background</u>

The Postwar Boom and the fall of the Modernism.

It It has been suggested by art critics and art denzions that the fall of the Modernist Movement in the United States was due to the Second World War which began in 1939 and ended in 1945. Every American citizen had the freedom to voice his opinions, it was no longer percieved as a solely middle-class society. Their economy was under rapid changes due to mass production and mass consumerism and the new emerging technologies.The United States entered the greatest period of economic growth in history. Businesses and people prospered, prosperity spread to more Americans than ever before. After the war industry resumed production on a much larger scale than ever before and new industries emerged such as electronics, plastics and frozen foods. A soaring birth rate increased the number of consumers. Between 1950 and 1960 the population of the U.S grew by 28 million. Labour unions became stronger and gained high wages for the workers. These developments mean't that more Americans had more money to spend on goods. Compared to previous societies in America, particularly during the war torn late 1930's, early 1940's, there was a massive increase in advertising in the media and television with a constant bombardment of visual images.

Art students like Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein emerging from art school seemed to be drowning amidst this new consumer culture. In the visual arts traditional modernist painting seemed a little insignificant beside billboard, TV and poster advertising. The Modernist aesthetic is in some way linked to the conception of the unique self and the private identity, which generated its own unique vision of the world. Post modernism sees this kind of individuality and personal identity formation as a thing of the past. The emergence of post modernism relates to the emergence of consumer capitalism, it tries to replicate and reinforce its logic, it became the transformation of reality into images. The dated Modernist beliefs or "utopian ambitions in functional design, purified architecture and scientific sociology"1. were very restrictive and too exclusive to be of any value to the everyday individual. Modernists work only mean't something to the few who could understand it. The Modernist's culture was not in keeping with all the changes that were taking place in their society. They were only interested in formal issues such as space, structure, rhythm and composition. What they had done was to develope and refine a formalist abstract language and they continually renunciated any external influences and

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imagery. The Modernist ideal of freedom looked to have been achieved in every way possible, this avant garde had been overtaken by consumerism and capitalism.

The emergence of Pop Art

The abstract expressionists in 1950's America, for example, Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning, Philip Guston, Arshille Gorky and Mark Rothko were a group of artists who were part of the last remaining modernist movements left before the arrival of Pop Art. Many of these artists were men who were exiled in New York during World War II. They were depression survivors with a mission to create a new American art. Their work was based on "inner sensation and experience" 2. ,with more emphasis on the materials they used for painting, concerning themselves with solving formal problems about form, colour and texture rather than dealing with issues such as the effects of the rampant consumer culture that they were a part of . Modernists did not accept technology as an aspect of art - making. It did not fit in with the Modernist ideal. Pop artists felt oppressed by the stance of the abstract expressionists in a world that was fast moving and rapidly changing. In the early 1960's artists began to experiment with the relationship between art and life. There was an acceptance of industrial processes, materials and methods for art making. The Pop artists, for example, Andy Warhol, James Rosenquist, Roy Lichtenstein, Claes Oldenburg and Tom Wesselman all demonstrated the direct connections between art and society, the subject matter of their work is popular culture. Life became art, and a performance in which we all play a role, the world itself became art, it became a spectacle. It was the beginning of a total breakaway form Modernism and Formalism.

"There was a move from art that could only refer to itself, to an art that referred to everything." 3.

These artists were looking for ways to strip their art of Abstract Expressionist gestures. Lichtenstein and Warhol took their imagery directly from the mass media for the production of their art. The images they used were as much a part of reality as any component could be, the media provided definitions of social life, the audience learned about its social world, identified with it and learned about it through media representation. Artists were in a unique position to call attention to these matters and their involvement gave them an opportunity for cultural intervention. They wished to highlight the fact that the media were setting standards for life and that the people were

being controlled and manipulated. The Pop artists were very much aware of this media power and tried to use its technique in the production of their art and to make people more aware of their culture. Their art was a genuinly accessible one, their work allowed the public in.The new electronic media tools (the computer, video and copier) that were now available opened up new areas for exploration in art, there was potential for fresh insight into things and a new aesthetic growth.

In 1934, the Museum of Modern Art (New York) held an exhibition in which "common household objects and industrial objects were on display as works of art" 4. This was the first merger of advertising and that of the visual rhetoric of art. Then during the 1960's the rise in mass consumption created a new job for artists. They were now part of a consumer society where the people just wanted to spend. The Pop artists were becoming an important part of media advertising due to their new and different approach to art making. They were now the subject of media advertising, the average person was more tuned into the artscene and their art was seen as another commodity.The power of the media had in a sense, created for them a new successful business. The Pop artists aesthetic could have been described as antiart, but they were simply commenting on the commercialism of their time. James Rosenquist used familiar photographic imagery that was in direct opposition to the Modernist and Formalist tendencies. Fig.1. p.13 Photo imagery and photomechanical reproduction methods became an important aspect of the pop aesthetic. Similar to the Dadaists they wanted to shock the people that saw their work, they wanted it to raise questions.

It was art manufactured for a mass audience and they developed an aesthetic of mass production. They deliberately celebrated "trashy American goods" 5. What these artists, particularly Andy Warhol were witnessing was a "rise in commodity aesthetics which has been said to mean the end of use value"6. The Pop artists noticed that people were and spending their money on goods with no real value, they were buying goods based on packaging, favouring one over the other based on how good it looked and because they had been informed by the constant glut of media advertising that they should have it. The persuasive power of media advertising was enticing the people to buy these unnecessary goods, basic function was becoming an unnecessary part of shopping. Pop artists, particularly Andy Warhol described the consumer as " the audience inside a department store being entertained by commodities" 7. He is one of the most renowned artists of his time, he like many artists before him in particular the

Dadaists, like Marcel Duchamp for example, completely changed the view of the artist as a "hermit" alienated individual who paints nice pictures in the confines of his own world. The artist was no longer a high priest or vicar and was consequently no longer privy to specialised information. By putting his stack of Brillo boxes in the art gallery, he was trying to promote the everyday chores as an adventure, like the trip to the supermarket, he was not calling them art. What Andy Warhol wanted to say was that everybody is an artist if they want to be. His repeat images were made to make us realise the effect the media has on us, how they assault us in a way. The media programmes us with values from which we try to escape, Warhol tries to confront this conflict in his work.
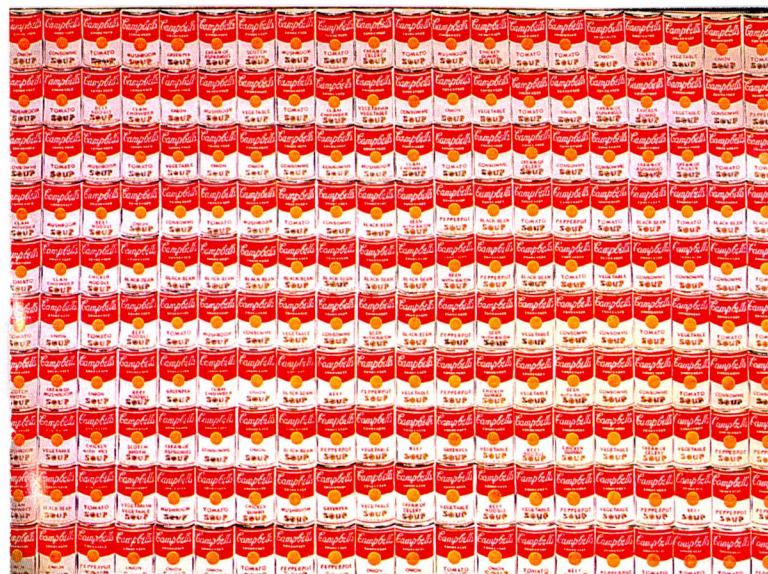
fig 2. Andy Warhol 200 Camball's Soup Cans 1962

"He emphasised an assemblage approach to art making and an openness to cultures influences" 8. The Pop artists brought forward the connections between art and society with their use of technology and images of mass culture.

The birth of Neo-Pop Art.

Even though Pop art did not last beyond the sixties it did open up avenues for experimentation for the next new wave of visual artists who became known as the Neo Pop artists like Robert Longo, Cindy Sherman and Jack Goldstein who have been described as the reincarnators of Pop art. These artists differ to the Pop artists like Warhol and Rosenquist in that they were a more diverse group of artists. During the 1970's artists had been self conscious in learning from the media, incorporating those regions of cultural experience rejected by modernist art.

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What these three artists work had in common was an attitude of familiarity towards popular culture with a mixture of love and contempt for the ever present images of capitalist consumerism. Like the work itself it became couched with aggressive attacks on the current practice in New York, which was still dominated by the severe geometrics of late Minimalism. This new wave of visual artists was led by an artist called Robert Longo. The abstract avantgarde formula ceased to be anyway satisfying for this new figurative artist. Like that of the generation he is identified with, he uses ready made images and what is amplified is their falsity. He and his generation had a different sense of imagery to the Pop artists. Again "it is the involvement of popular culture with a relationship between the artist and the commercial world of television entertainment, fashion and industry" 9. There was a move towards a combination of all the arts, music, theatre, dance and performance similar to what people were seeing back in the sixteenth century with Mannerism in Rome and Florence and then again with the emergence

fig.3 Robert Longo, Untitled 1981.

of Baroque art in Rome in the seventeenth century. New Wave/Neo Pop and Baroque art had the same ambition, to combine music, art and performance as a unified whole and to try and engage a wider audience by interacting with the people directly. The seventeenth century artist enjoyed the escapism found in stage performance, creating a spectacle of themselves by dressing up in wigs and theatre costumes and going on stage to play musical instruments. .Music performed its function, it had at this time reached an extreme and unprecedented perfection.The Baroque was a time when art was consuming life, life itself was art. The New Wave scene in the 1970's was a time like this, a time of artistic self expression through entertainment. Both era's unleashed themselves from the confines of the artworld and projected all feeling out to the external world.

The Mannerists like Rosso Fiorentino and Giovanni Bologna had a vitality and freshness of invention similar to the Neo Pop artists in the twentieth century. They

pursued variety, their works of art have been described in term of tension, reaction or irrationalism and tried to shock in a discomforting way not unlike the Pop artists. Their historical contexts seem to dip into our century more than the sixteenth century as there is a modern day flavour in their work. Could it be correct to assume that Mannerism may have been the beginning of Modern art? Rosso Fiorentino abandoned the study of nature and concentrated solely on the figure. The figures in their work would writhe or turn uncomfortably within the frame and were often enlarged to epic proportions very like Robert Longo's figures. They both exploited emotional devices that relate the spectator directly to the action in the work of art. There is an obsession with the audiences reaction to their work, it was a very important part of the works function. Mannerist works are conceived in the spirit of performances as it is in Longo's drawings. Each individual is playing in some kind of performance, it is also evident in Baroque art. Baroque appeared after Mannerism and rather than an aggressive reform of the movement it seemed to order the exuberance of it and stretched it further. In her book, The Baroque- Principles, Styles, Modes, Themes, Germain Bazin has described it as one of the great crossroads of art history, we see another cross-roads with the emergence of Pop and Neo Pop art from a Modernist era into the New Post-modernist era. Baroque was described as a "wild and barbarous art, the degenerative bastard of the Renaissance even within the art world" 10. Both Mannerism and NeoPop artists sought a wider audience unlike their predecessors. Renaissance artists painted pictures of beauty and of a higher reality solely for the upper middle class society. Pop artists were somewhat similar, their work remained inside a gallery space for only the art world to see, both movements made no acknowledgement of the ordinary everyday people. Neo Pop and Mannerism moved a step forward in their dealings with art and society. Their art was accessible to the average person. One could say it was on a more realistic level.

Mannerism and Neo Pop artists sought to demonstrate the truth, they wanted the audience to enter the process as an essential element in a dialogue with the creator of the work. The Mannerist artists like Rosso Fiorentino and Giovanni Bologna like the Neo Pop artists Robert Longo and Jack Goldstein refused to let man be pushed into second place. They wanted to talk about the culture they lived in, with every man as a part of that culture. Mannerism is a phenomenon that can be explained by modern terms of reference. "Our prejudices and problems" 11. For Robert Longo his art is about his world, the problems and pressures of modern life and the madness of our time. The

standards of our time do not usually give us the right guidance to understanding a past age. History usually describes the past as different from the present, but here they appear similar. It is as though history has completed a circle from the sixteenth century around to the twentieth century.

## Robert Longo and the Media, the Media and Robert Longo.

Longo's work is a vision of human existence in the age that he is a part of, where there seems to be a lack of fulfilment in life. "While Warhol created a disaster series of empty electric chairs in pastel shades to emphasise the unconcern for such subjects as capital punishment, Longo intensified his subjects using techniques of advertising to hype death." While Warhol keeps his images low key, Longo pays attention to the the glamour, the violence and the giant billboards and magazine adverts. Warhol is an artist that commented on the materialism of the fifties and sixties, he was attached to the idea that the United States was an over-grown republic which needed reminding of its true nature. On the other hand, Longo pictures a disillusioned country due to the Vietnam war and its loss of idealism. He is committed to the public, his work is for everybody. Neo Pop art has an awareness of the power of spectacle which differs from representation which works via our faith in its realism, spectacle works via our fascination with the hyper real perfect image that make us whole at the price of resigning to a set of false beliefs. The work of this new wave of NeoPop artists for example, Cindy Sherman, Jack Goldstein and Robert Longo had an awareness of this sheer power of spectacle. "Its a time when artists look to the media and the media looks to art, each looking to each other for the solution to their problems"12.
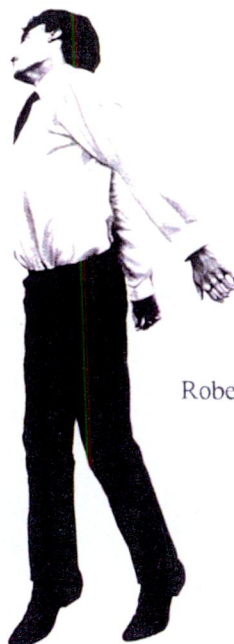
Robert Longo. A figure from Men Trapped in Ice.

fig. 4 Cindy Sherman Untitled no. 136 1982
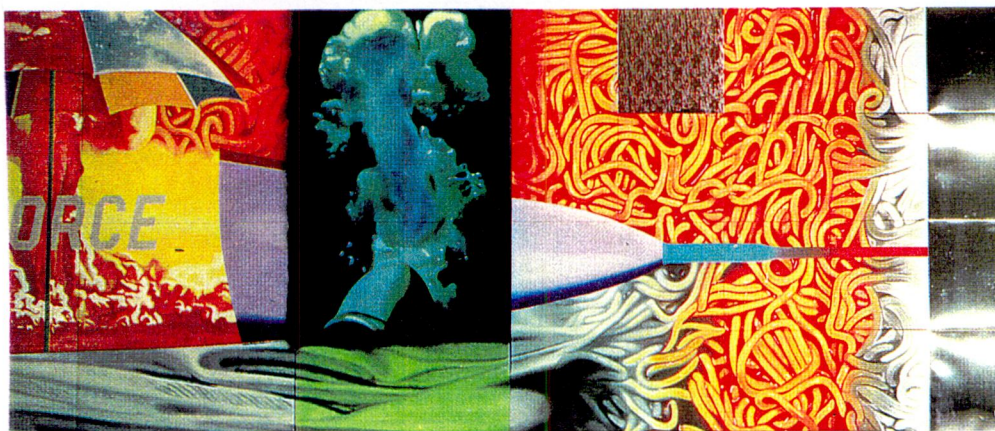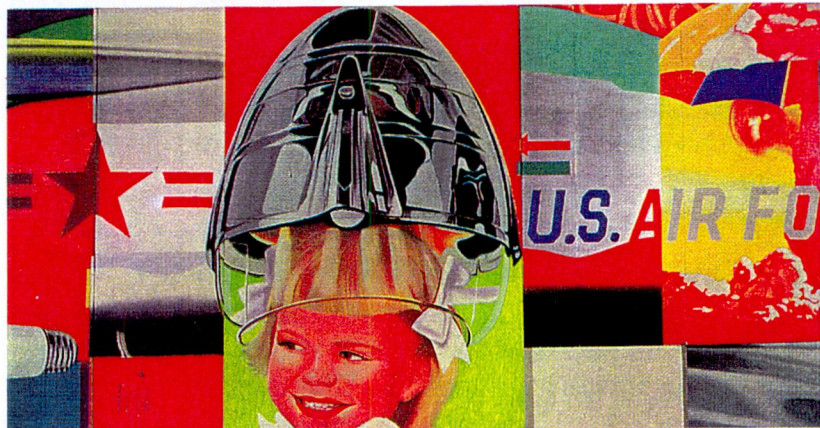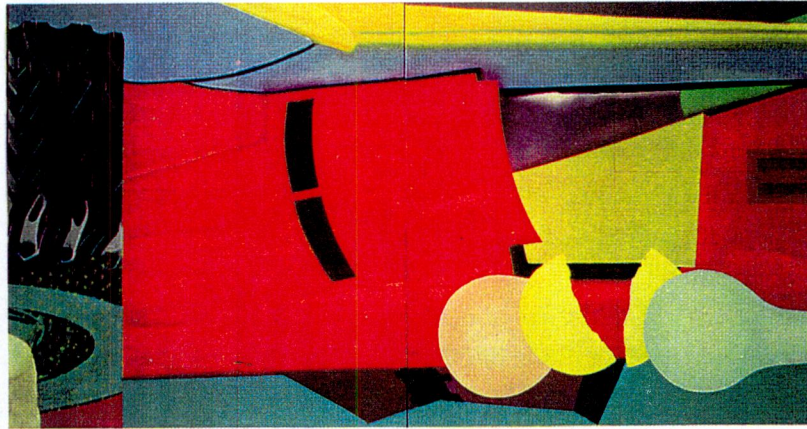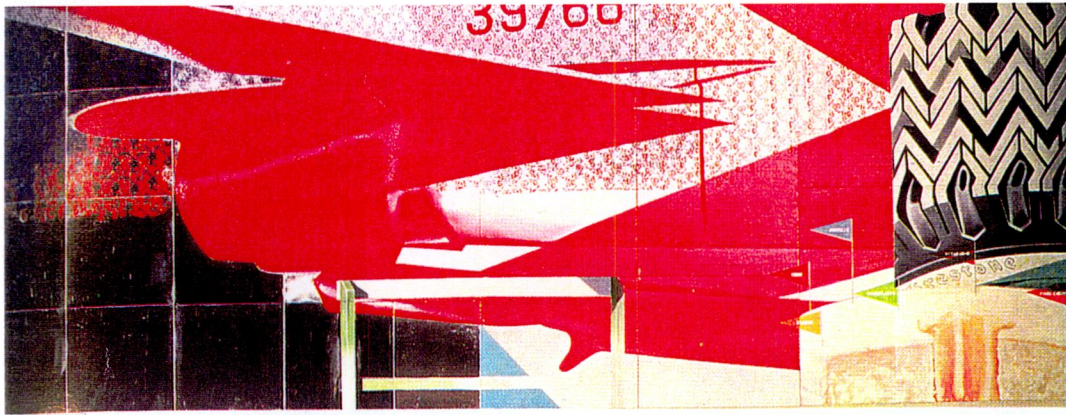
James Rosenquist, The F 111, 1965

Chapter 2.   The New Wave Scene In New York

T.V Reality in the 1960's

During the 1960's in the United States of America one witnessed rapid social transformation with the arrival of the contraceptive pill, radical feminism, antiwar protests and an increase in the consumption of drugs. The American public were more aware of these developments because they could see it on the television. Technological progress provided a strong incentive for social changes. During 1958, an astounding forty two million American homes were receiving broadcasts to their living rooms from fifty two stations. This new media strongly contributed to a new cultural condition, there was a change in attitude across the world. The television image culture brought about changes in the way one saw and the way one lived ones life. Peoples minds were constantly being stimulated by a glut of images, old movies, soap operas and depiction's of domestic life. Americans during the 1960's were feeding off the media to such an extent that it was beginning to dull their sense of individuality. The people were starting to long for the return to the simplicity of the non-sophisticated pleasures in life, such as cardgames, dances and singsongs, that people living in the 1940's were entertained by before the arrival of television. The artificial representation of reality, in the media, had become a dominant feature, everything was becoming more and more complicated, making individual decisions about ordinary things seemed to be more difficult to make. People were left between the reality of daily life and television reality, where the television becomes the real self, this brought about a certain sense of a loss of the real. Now the use of intensified images and messages with a shock value had become a part of every day viewing.

In the mid to late seventies, television viewing figures that had been calculated during the 1960's started to decline as another array of addiction cultures were emerging and expanding.The most interesting places to hang out in New York were the few bars and clubs in the East Village, downtown Manhattan, associated with a new speedy psychotic music which came to be called punk. It was a time when music and the clubscene became more and more important to the younger generation. It seemed to be more satisfying to put all their energy into one interest, they knew it was one thing they could had full control over. Images of television as manipulative began to abound with the lyrics and consciousness of the new wave culture and sophisticates wished to register a cautious distance.

Art and Entertainment Converge

Greenwich Village, Manhattans lower west side 1965 in a place called the Cafe Bizarre. This was to be the venue for a group "The Velvet Underground" who had only recently appeared on the music scene. Andy Warhol was a regular customer at the cafe and recognised a talent in this band. At the time Warhol's famous factory was known almost by everybody for its alternative art film production. He wanted to start introducing a rock and roll element to his creations and he wanted the Velvets to help him do this.

fig.5. The Velvet Underground, Nico, and Andy Warhol at the Factory, New York 1966.

He asked them to come and play at his factory and they signed up immediately. Warhol opened up a show soon after their union and called it "Andy Warhol Uptight" on February 1966 at the cinematique. It comprised a seven minute long black and white movie accompanied by the Velvets and introducing a new vocalist, a Hungarian girl called Nico who he had spotted and picked up to come and work with him. He called it "The Velvet Underground and Nico, A symphony of sound". He incorporated strobe lights, dancers and slide projectors in the show, it was a multimedia performance and became known as the "Exploding Plastic Inevitable", it was the first time the artworld had seen this combination." It's not the boundaries between art and life that had been erased, but those between the artworld and the entertainment industry, between art and the media , between life and television" 1.

Warhol arranged for "The Velvet Underground" to take up residency in the lower east side of Manhattan. They opened up a hall called the Dom. At this point the East Village was not been talked about until they moved there, then things began to change.

From the Velvet Underground to New wave.

Around 1975, there was a New Wave of rock and roll bands coming into NewYork looking for somewhere to play.It was a club called CBGB'S in the Bowery in the heart of the East Village that began to present this new brand of rock and roll that took its attitude from British punk.. CBGB's was not the place you went to hang out, you went to see and hear the latest bands. Rules were not enforced there like most night clubs in NewYork, once you paid in you could stay all night or come and go as you pleased to see your preferred groups. It presented bands like The Ramones, Patti Smith, Blondie and Talking Heads, a group of performing artists using rock and roll as their medium,it was their own way of taking on contemporary culture. During the period 1975-1978, the Soho Gallery scene had become "institutionalised and the visual arts were losing their impetus" 2. It was performance art and rock performance that seemed to offer a fresh challenge to many new young artists. "During the sixties to be interested in the art scene was to be into the Factory, to be into music was to be into the Velvet Underground " 3. But now in the seventies, New Wave was it, a time when artists began headlining the clubs in search of a wider audience. The popularity of crossover styles in the seventies was partly a reaction against the media purity associated with modernist painting . More and more artists began to realise this was the way to reinject life into their work. For the NewYork artworld CBGB's and the Museum of Modern Art could be interchangeable

venues. Suddenly art had become all spectacle and as fast moving as the entertainment's industry. Robert Longo was one of these crossover artists, he played in a rock band called the Menthol Wars. Contemporary music was a fundamental source for his imagination, bands like the Talking Heads, Joy Division

fig 6. Robert Longo and The Menthol Wars, 1976.

and The Ramones were his power source. They provided him with an energy to create his artwork. The combination of music and performance was flourishing. A lot of people thought that New Wave only affected music but it affected the whole art scene also. For the Neo Pop artists cum entertainers such as David Byrne and Robert Longo it was more the marketing aspect than creating good music that appealed to them, they supervised their own packaging manipulating their images in reaction to the media stereotypes.

They wanted to create their own image by using the media to their advantage and still retaining full control of their identity. They used the media instead of the media using them. Their style of appearance began to take on a late 1940's revival look, a film noir style of dress, wearing black suits and white shirts, the overall look was ambiguous. The fashion of the new wave musician comprised a dark suit with a white shirt and a tie, it became the uniform of the time. A good example of this particular look was David Byrne from *Talking Heads*.

fig.7. David Byrne and Robert Byrne at club Tier3, New York., 1978.

Robert Longo takes on the Artworld.

Art graduates during the 1970's either became entertainers or continued as artists. Robert Longo opted for the latter after his experimentation in the music industry was over. When he did return to the visual arts he never abandoned his roots in music. Instead "he used the New Wave energy by putting it back into his work" 4. Unlike his friend David Byrne from *Talking Heads*, once an artist also he remained in the entertainment business. Both Byrne and Longo arrived in Manhattan, New York, around the same time after spending time in different art schools. David Byrne was trained at the Rhode Island School of Design while Robert Longo studied at the State University of Buffalo, New York. On arrival to Manhattans downtown they were both immediately plugged into the New Wave scene. David Byrne was the multi-talented lead singer with this group. He gathered his ideas from many fields, music , art, film and theatre. Byrne could have been described as collector, taking ideas from various cultures and the media to express the world we live in. *Talking Heads* were college graduates with radical new ideas, they wanted to bring art and life together. Byrnes songs were about boring everyday issues but he made them more dramatic. He wrote in praise of gainful employment, television, violence, pollution and disaster. They suddenly became a political statement as well as a rock band and it brought them a new social position.

Byrne has been described as a performance artist and for him gesture is all. The performances are expressive, like a theatrical performance. He like any performer, works to understand the purpose and emotional reason behind each movement so he performs his actions in character. But it is mostly spontaneous for him, blurting out his lyrics in a repetitive manner. He found it almost impossible not to dance on stage. He is renowned for his strange dances, jogging on the spot, arching back, staggering and vibrating and smacking his forehead. He danced wearing suits which were to big and his figure was lost in them. A man with a style of his own and an artist that worked in popular culture as much as rock and roll. He always kept one foot in the downtown scene as did Longo. For Byrne "The music is less a revolt than a strategy for survival in a world in which the television is never switched off " 5. this was also the case for Robert Longo except that it was his art rather then his music that became his form of survival.

NeoPop, Television and Jack Goldstein.

For the NeoPop artists the qualities of television were more interesting than it's contents. In particular Jack Goldstein, one of Longo's contemporaries, whose work tries to awaken a feeling of awe within us, which he finds in the cinema screen and in the sheer power of domination of the media image. He reflects upon the reality of consumption and perhaps aspires to the same level of unreality as the media image. With his use of images he tries to evoke ambiguity and response. He recycles the media, merely allowing what is already there to show itself in its elevation to the aesthetic. His pictures are as manipulative and as alienating as the images that surround us everyday, they appear as dimensionless as advertisements. He tries to use the language of the media, the language that is given to him, the language of culture . We have all become passive enough to accept the fact that it controls and manipulates us. David Salle had this to say about Jack Goldstein at an exhibition at Hallwalls 1978. "The obvious parallel lies in aligning ones art with the representational modes which are used culturally to convey and limit our sense of self, when ones goal is to distance or liberate oneself from that control and to establish a greater level of control." 6. A piece I like in particular is his MGM cine-logo, a film loop continuously repeating the Metro Goldwyn Mayer logo with the sound of the lions roar .fig.8 p.25. It is effective due to its simplicity and is designed to command our attention. It is a symbol of media imperialism, adopting the vantage point of the consumer rather than the producer of the image. Goldstein is reflecting upon the reality of consumption, and aspires to the same

level of unreality as the media image. Artists like Robert Longo and Jack Goldstein possess this new sense of imagery and information obtained from television since they were children. Hence, they became known as the New Image artists or otherwise known as the Neo-Popsters.

Robert Longo grew up a media child, watching television every moment he could. He has always found it visually stimulating and the influence of television on Longo is evident. As a child he would re-create images from the television, magazines and comic books, all of the mass media. He would draw sketchs of his heroes, like cowboys or soldiers. This love of movies stems back to this time in his youth. It remained with him when he moved on to art college and on through working life. "He considers himself a media artist and the media his teacher" 7. Television was the primary source of inspiration for him until he moved to New York and discovered the power of cinema.

The Andy Warhol and R.W Fassbinder influence.

"American identity shapes and is shaped by motion pictures" 8.

The movies are a very important part of our mass culture, they both interact with each other, they shape and mould each other. Cinema determines an individuals or societies understanding of the world in which they live. During the seventies two alternative film-makers were being talked about in New York's downtown, they were Andy Warhol and Rainer Werner Fassbinder. Their film productions were very different in most ways but some of Warhols films had a flavour of Fassbinders technique. Andy Warhol was not one of the most famous film-makers to come out of New York but certainly one of the most influential for many of the artists that came after him. He became well known for his use of still images at the beginning of his film-making career which Longo adapts later for his art-making. An example of Warhols first still movie is "Empire" which runs for eight hours with no sound. It is a black and white still non-fiction film, he emphasises the importance of time with the slow passing of day into night with the empire state building in view. It was the first time this type of film had been seen. He liked the idea that his films were boring or empty and went on for hours due to abandoning editing completely seeing it as a form of censorship. He turned to film as a way of expanding his painting and performance work. He wanted to create theatricality and he used film to try and achieve this. Moving into film was another episode in his life-long career in the media industry. It made him even more prominent in the media. The repetition of his coca cola bottles,Campbells soup cans and superstars all have

similar qualities to the images in his films. He always tried to create a personal image of the world.

His film production was certainly an eye opener for many art school graduates like Longo and his fellow Neo Pop artists. He radically changed artists perceptions of what art-making was meant to be, there were no limits anymore to what they could achieve. Andy Warhol became an infamous celebrity figure lionised by the art world for his extreme ideas. His lifestyle and his art created a new phenomenon, the artist as famous star. He changed the path of art making, emmersing himself in the different media, keeping no limits on what he could achieve. This new experimental art inspired many artists such as Longo and Goldstein to take it further and feeling free to do so. Longo once described movies as "moving paintings", he saw the images as "potential compositions" 9. He began experimenting with this idea and took stills from movies as inspiration. His first piece of work to come out of this experimentation was "An American Soldier", a cast aluminium piece, an image that was taken directly from the movie "An American Soldier" by the German

Fig 9 An American Soldier. 1977.

Robert Longo.

film producer Rainer Werner Fassbinder. As young artists, Robert Longo and his friends would go to the movies on Bleecher Street, downtown Manhatten, instead of hanging out in the confines of a white gallery space. It was there that Longo first tasted the effect of R.W Fassbinder and it there that he first saw "An American Soldier" and was immediately impressed by it , in particular the movies final scene. "An American Soldier" is a "conventional narrative film and is full of film quotes from Hollywood films and French gangster movies" 10. It works in a very melodramatic way, he employs complicated camera movement coupled with the framing of each shot which creates a self conscious mode of representation. In the last scene, Ricky, The Vietnam veteran turned hired killer was lured into a trap by the police, wishing to escape he tries slowing them down by turning over tables. Then suddenly from behind he heard his mother and brother calling out for him, turning to reply he is gunned down. It is this exact moment that Longo captures in his aluminium piece which he entitled "An American Soldier".

It depicts the figure of a man wearing a wide brimmed hat and a white shirt with a stripped tie. He is posed with his torso arched forward and his left hand tucked into the small of his back. Because there is no other information, no narrative, the figure is simply displayed against a white background, there is nothing to explain the way the figure is standing. It is hard to tell what is happening, unlike the film where we know exactly what has happened as we hear the gunshot and watch the victim fall to the ground whereas Longo's figure could be dancing or suffering from a knife wound .

In Fassbinders movies there is a lot of exaggerated gesture, the physical gestures of the protagonists never seem to match their intentions.

Fassbinder was known to convey his personal pain on screen as did Warhol, his films describe much of his personality, they are like "records of self exposure" 11. As a child Fassbinder was never acknowledged by his father and neglected by his mother. He was consoled by the movies and knew from experience that the audiences desire a lot of the time is to have their loneliness alieviated. His films are about imprisonment and entrapment. There is betrayal and most of his films end in suicide, murder or accident. He exploits the viewers emotions and makes them reflect on their feelings, much of the feeling and impact is that of pessimism with an occasional moment of optimism. His films are abrasive, choppy and translucent, made to provoke and unsettle, not to comfort and reassure. They are constantly fascinating and richly involving .They refuse to flatter

the audience, preferring to niggle at it. They are very much films of their time, snapshots of paranoia. He like the artists of the seventies were "children of the fifties weaned on television, radio, records and movies" 12. They look to the past more and more for a sense of comfort from a time when they feel confused, a time when they seem to be losing control of their self control. Their view of life had become satirical, they held it up to ridicule and scorn.

After the Vietnam war, Fassbinder's movies seemed to speak to peoples feelings of alienation and the cynicism that penetrated the popular culture of that time. It was a time when the individual felt alienated within mass society, a time when the people were left with a hurt pride, bitterness and many painful memories. It would explain why R.W Fassbinder films were so popular in the mid seventies. Fassbinders films have film noir qualities such as low key lighting and claustrophobic framing which concealed or disguised prohibited subject matter, acts of sadism or scenes of sexual depravity, they all contributed to a sense of fear on screen.. His films appealed to American audiences in the seventies because much of the contents and feeling in his movies describe their feelings of pessimism and disillusionment. His work impressed Warhol greatly which he expressed to Fassbinder openly on their occasional meetings at his studio on Broadway. The composition of Warhols films echo Fassbinders technique of visual excess, this is particularly evident in his film "Vinyl" where there are seven figures in one scene posing within the shallow playing area and interacting with each other with outbursts of anger, pain and sexual desire, emotions which can be seen in Fassbinders movie "An American Soldier".In the final scene when Ricky the Vietnam veteran gets shot, he falls to the ground. The brother is deranged by grief and falls on Rickys body and writhes on the ground with it, the only movement in the otherwise static frame. The mother stays an immobile silhouette in the back of the shot. We are left with an unsettling extended sex and death ballet on the central ground. He tries to bring the queer undercurrents of noir up to the surface.

"Men in the Cities" commence.

The imagery in Fassbinders films in particular "An American Soldier". For Longo it resembled a moment between a dance and a violent act. "Men in the Cities" a series of drawings which he began in 1977 grew directly out of this single image. The Fassbinder style is even more obvious in this series of drawings, there is that feeling of isolation and emptiness and that loneliness of being a person, that feeling of alienation. He was very much aware of the disillusionment his country was feeling and its loss of

idealism. The ten foot charcoal drawings of urban men and women seem to be under control by some cultural or social conditions. Their gestures are exaggerated, they fall around like puppets on a string. Fig.10. p.24. They appear like characters in a movie, they are actually drawings of his friends, a generation of people he describes as "doomed Souls" or "fallen angels" 13. He created the "Men in the Cities" series like a motion picture production and describes his role as that of a movie director, which he did become later on in 1987 when he produced a thirty four minute film called "Arena Brains". "A film which provides an attack on the sterility of the power hungry art-world."16 What we see are six scenes of conflict between an artist and a critic, among a group of women in a night-club, among artists at a party, between two would be lovers and between an abused women and an abusive entertainer. The scenes are bound together by the watcher, "a schizophrenic figure who lives in a post-industrial barracks full of drawings and maps".17 The shift from one scene to the other is marked by Longos guitar chords. The artist and the dealer out on the street are straight out of "Men in the Cities" dressed in dark suits they even mimic the drawings and the images of struggle. He moves from one medium to another taking the same idea through different forms of representation. It shows his pure desire to assert its meaning than anything else.

Initially Longo emmersed himself in the music scene absorbing the NewWave culture as his style, taking with him it's unique body language and gestures that stem back to the Mannerist period in the seventeenth centuary. A technique that was developed by the expression of passion, expression for these artists mean't that body movements were governed by the passions of the soul. The gestures being the impulse of the passions produced within a person who is determined to remain in command of himself. The NewWave gestures are also an expression of a passion, a passion for music. David Byrnes gestures work together with his music as self expression.
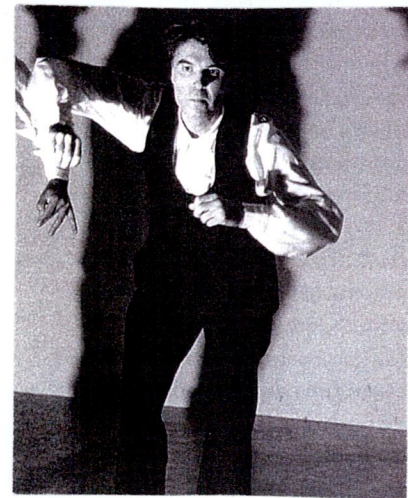

Fig11. David Byrne 1980.

Longo's drawn figures in Men in the Cities are like stills from a David Byrne performance. The figures are halted in mid motion, some are arching back or hunched forward and appear to be trapped in poses and symbolise according to Longo "the

agonised modern man" 14. Both artists deal with identity, they project their lives beyond themselves, a sort of self dramatisation, all acts seem to be dictated by the need to establish identity. There is a demand for autonomy and authority over the culture to which they are a member. In Men in the Cities, the gestures are violent, a violence that Fassbinder movies seemed to bring to the surface in Longo.

"Fassbinder was a prototype for Longo, a film maker that discerned death to be eclipsed by a more discriminating and enhancing violence" 15.

The artist's South Street studio, c. 1979
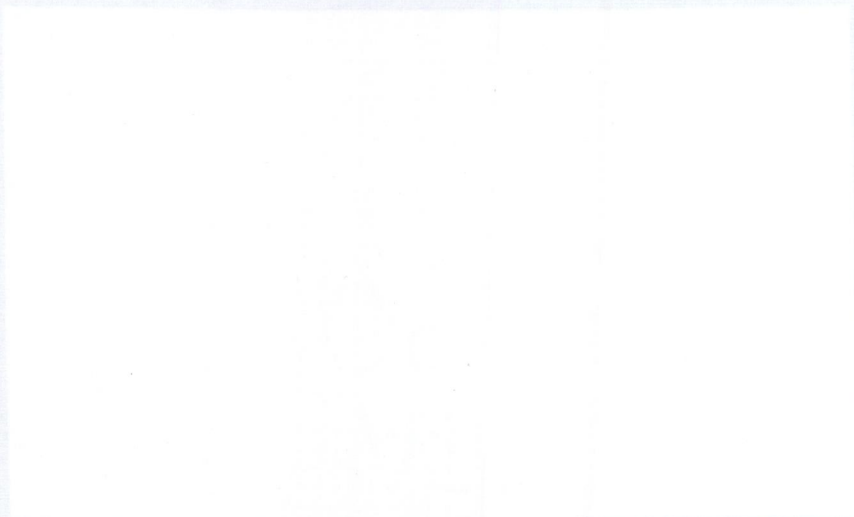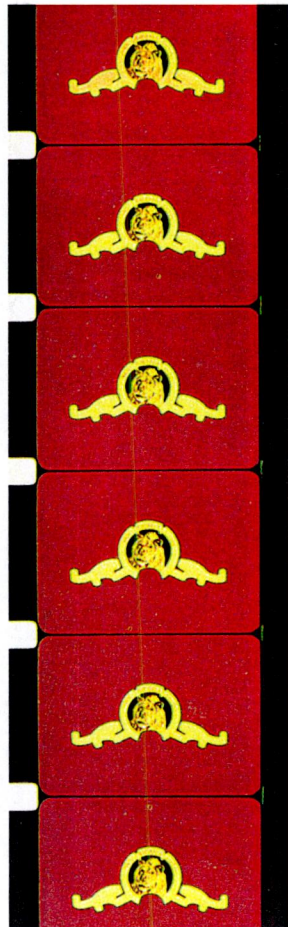
Jack Goldstein, MGM, 1976.

Chapter3

Robert Longo and the revival of Mannerism.

In this chapter, I make clear what I feel are obvious connections between Robert Longo's Men in the Cities series and the drawings of the 16th centuary Rome and Florentine Mannerists. I make the comparison between his work and that of Rosso Fiorentino, Jacoba Pontormo, Giovanni Bologna, Lodovico Carracci and Giorgio Vasari. What interested me the most during the course of my research into these Mannerist artists work, was the undeniable similarities between the use of figurative gesture in their paintings and the figurative gesture in Longo's charcoal drawings of his Men in the Cities. Robert Longo as a NeoPop artist separated from Mannerism by almost five centuaries appears to have adopted much of the Mannerist artists style and characteristics, using the traditions of their art introducing the gestures of the 80's.

Mannerism emerged in Rome, Italy around 1520 just after the High Renaissance and lasted approximately seventy five years until the arrival of Baroque art. Some would say that Mannerism was a reaction against the High Renaissance and others would say that it was simply an extension of their inclinations and accomplishments. I would agree that Mannerism was a reaction, but only a reaction to the rapid changes that were taking place within society at that time.

The cold formalism of the Mannerists work has been recognised as part of a movement that placed the notion of "inner vision" 1. above the Renaissance artists belief that nature had all authority. They manipulated the old masters figure drawings, " it was their inner compulsion that manifested itself in exaggerations and distortions of forms as well as expressions " 2. There are close similarities between the sixteenth century and the twentieth century, which include social disintegration, the alienation of the people and the mechanisation of life.

The same senses of life lead to similar art forms. The figurative gestures in Robert Longo's drawings are very Manneristic in style and the reasons for the gestures are similar also.

During the 1520's the Reformation was at it's peak, people were being told of their inevitable afterlife and that man had the freedom to choose his own fate. They felt trapped under this fixed fate and set of rules which they had no power to change, they felt abandoned. The Mannerists were sensitive to these problems and portrayed this feeling of insecurity in their work. Society at the time

began to see the first signs of a technical age with the introduction of the steam turbine which as a consequence accelerated the working process. Efficient technology aiding mechanical reproduction, enhanced productivity, reducing the necessity for human imput into mining and production which was the major employer of the time. Left out of work, the labourer was dehumanised and became simply another commodity. Man was no longer the craftsman who had always been a necessary individual in society. His importance was diminished with a certain sense of a loss of identity. Man was creating objects that the individual was beginning to depend on. With that people were starting to lose that sense of control in their lives, man was losing himself in his own creations. The concept of commodities became the fundamental category of social life, it reshaped and refashioned every field of human endeavour. Luxury consumed society, now their way of thinking conformed to the ideology of commodities.

As a result a feeling of lonliness and alienation set in, here we see a link to Longo's work and that of Fassbinder, that strong sense of alienation is evident. Alienation has always existed, it began when man started to tie himself to conventions, traditions and institutions. It expresses a cultural crisis of a time, in this particular era people felt a sense of having lost contact with society, there was a sense of estrangement and a loss of the self, the doubt about the reality and identity of the self.

In the sixteenth centuary alienation took hold when peoples beliefs began to fade. For the people, the church was the center of all religious life. They felt that God would grant them salvation if they went to Mass regularly and did good work.. The Reformation claimed that the individual was the center of religious life. God would grant salvation to someone undeserving and deny it to another who appeared more deserving because of arbitrary and perhaps injust nature. A lot of people in society found this too much to take and too drastic a change to accept.

Their beliefs were being deminished and as a result life became more of a struggle for them. The world had become a lonely and alienating place in which to live.

The age of Mannerism in Italy was first threatened by a rising tide of institutionalisation. The economic and justice system were now adapting and reflecting a structural environment moulded by the exponential changes introduced by the industrial revolution and the Reformation.

There were now new economic pressures in the market place with the introduction of taxes and tarifs. Rules and regulations had became more and more stringent and the people had to adapt themselves to them. Mannerism expressed the unrest, anxiety and bewilderment generated by the process of alienation of the individual from society. The Mannerists portrayed in their work the struggle of the people of their time as Longo's work did with the people of his generation.

The gestures in the paintings and drawings portray a struggle within the individual, a struggle to find the true self. They portray modern tragedy and their movements are an expression of their failure in life. The Mannerists figures and Longos figures are in a continual state of " inner conflict " 3, they are standing between right and wrong, compulsion and freedom of choice and are constantly at war with themselves. What I can see connecting Longo to the Mannerists is the language, the ' figura serpentinata ', the flamelike serpentine figure. The Mannerists believed that there was no better form than that of the flame and that " a figure is at it's highest grace and eloquence when it is seen in that movement " 4. It was actually Michelangelo that invented it, saying that " the figure will not be graceful unless it has the serpentinata form ".4 He shows this use of form in his piece of sculpture " victory " where the main figure is s shaped and flamelike. It appears contorted because they followed a rule at the time. The head of the figure had to turn in opposition to the hips, one leg remained straight while the other was free and flexed. The parts of the body were arranged asymmetrically.

The Mannerists took this style even further , still keeping the figure in the serpentinata shape, but the limbs are elongated to the point of distortion, they appear ghostly and have hollow eyed expressions similar to Longo's figures.

The Mannerists figures show force with central upward movements freeing them from all contact with the earth which is also evident in all of Longo's " Men in the Cities " except that there is no earth beneath them at all, they seem to float within a vacuum.
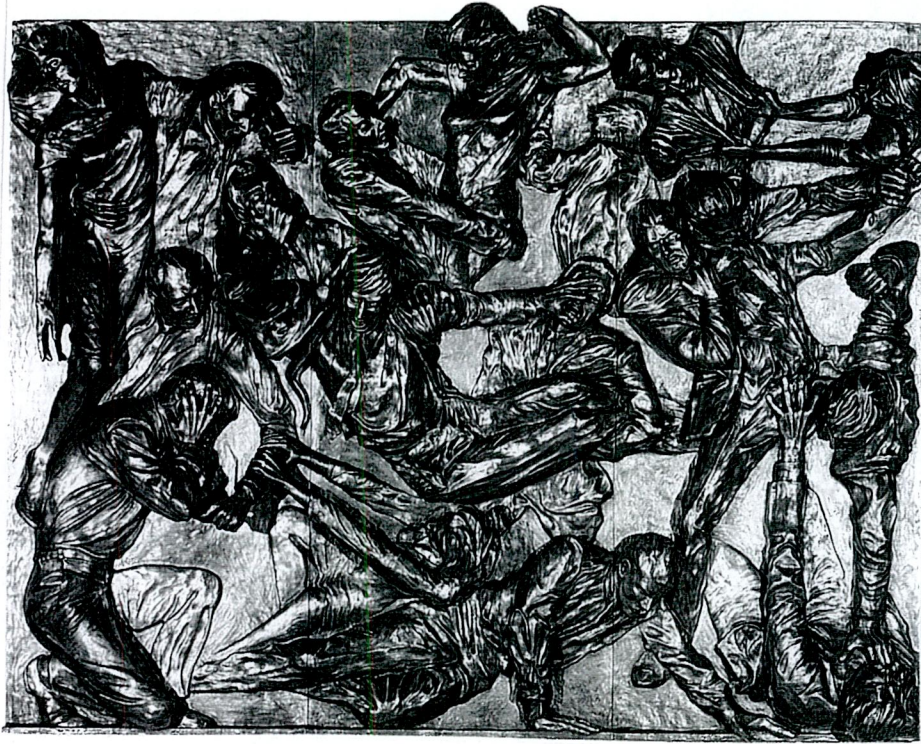
fig.12. Corporate Wars 1982

The style could be described as theatrical, with a heightened sense of expressiveness. A lot of Mannerist paintings depict large violently agitated groups of people, with bodies overlapping as we see in Longo's alluminium piece Corporate Wars " in which we see a group of men all interwined in exaggerated movements as they fight each other off. It is a piece of work that could be compared to a painting by Rosso Fiorentino called " Moses and the daughters of Jethro", Fig.13.p.35 in which we see the violent scene of Moses in battle with three shepherds which he has thrown to the ground in rage as he tries to protect the daughters of Jethro. All figures are in motion as they are in " Corporate Wars ". The gestures are violent and distorted, there is a violent Mannerist strand running through Longo's work. Violence demonstrates the real nature of man, his fundamental will to destruction, his resentment of ideas and ideals and all other artificial constructions. Mannerist paintings and Longo's drawings act as windows , and what we see through them are the intensities of ecstacy and dread, they are confrontational. Artists that deal with violence act as mirror holders, holding up the mirror in which he can contemplate the essential beastliness of mankind. " Creating figures that do such things, means allowing full play to the darker parts of the mind without fear of what one may unwittingly be revealing about oneself " 5. These artists try to turn the cruelty of

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life they feel so strongly, to the audience, subjecting them to the same cruelty. They put them in a position that can be shocking or depressing.

Longo's cast alluminium piece the " American Soldier " immediately says Mannerism with its violent bodily gesture and haunting facial expression, it takes on the form of the figura serpentinata as do his " Men in the Cities ". The American Soldier with that flamelike shape and violent appearance remains radical however often one looks at it.

Its a piece that could be compared to Giovanni Bologna's piece of sculpture the "Rape of the Sabine ". They both have rhythms that sweep through their forms. The Rape of the Sabine is the American Soldier in three dimensions. Three flamelike figures of contrasting character combined in a common action. The figures spiral upward in a distorted gesture as though in pain, like the American Soldier who has been shot in the back. The Mannerist figures appear agitated yet rigid as if congealed by a sudden icy blast. There forms appear as though they are under control of a puppet mechanisation expressing the feeling of unfreedom, confinement and inhibition. Their movements seem forced and artificial like Longo's Men in the Cities , there is a struggle against this force or control making them appear exaggerated in
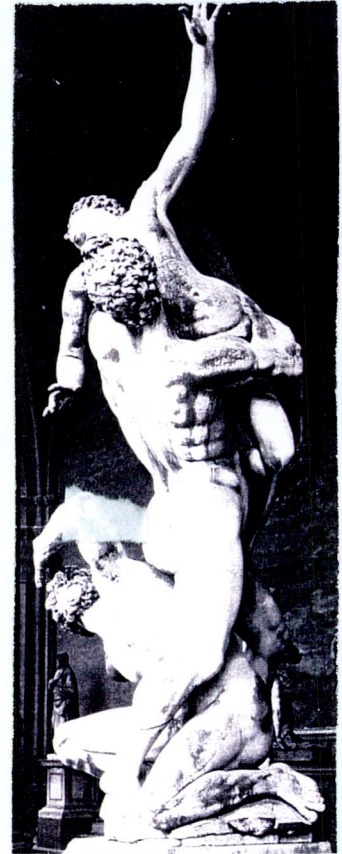
fig.14. The Rape of the Sabine. Giovanni Bolongna

gesture and form. The images are made to make us feel uncomfortable because one is being confronted by facts that maybe we had'nt thought about carefully enough.

In order to illustrate my point about Longo's connection to Mannerism, I have actually isolated Mannerist figures from their usual contexts and place them on a completely white background beside some of Longo's figures from " Men in the Cities " and compared them. The first figure, is taken from Giorgo Vasari's " Immaculate Conception ", Fig.15.p.36 in which we see the Virgin surrounded by angels, she sets her foot on the serpent whose body is wound around a tree, under which we see Adam and Eve, Moses and Aaron and other patriarchs and prophets, one of which I have highlighted. The figure reclines with his arm
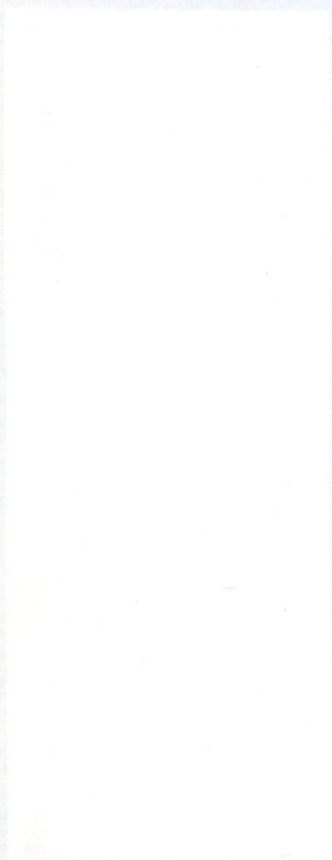
protecting his face in fear or distress of what he is witnessing, we can feel that sense of pure emotion.

But when the figure is taken out of context, it could now mean anything. He may be suffering a violent blow to the head and fallen under the pain. There is a similarity between Longo's untitled drawings of the fallen female figure and Vasari's prophet. Their gestures are the same, the only difference in all these drawings is the clothing, its the only thing that separates them from each other and the fact that one figure was drawn in the sixteenth centuary and the other in the twentieth centuary. The second figure is taken from a painting by Lodovico carracci called " Transfiguration" Fig.17.p.37 where we see the figure of Christ soaing above the earth between Moses and Elijah, below are the three awestruck apostles, one of which I have taken as an

Fig. 16 Untitled 1982. Robert Longo and a figure from Immaculate

example. Carracci is known for his wildly agitated male figures, this particular one bares some resemblences to an American Soldier with his arched back and protruding torso. Taken out of context this apostle could be gesturing anything, he could also have received a bullet wound to his back which distorts his shape. Beside Longo's figure the gestures are again similar. Without narration these figures could be dancing or dying, the decison is left up to the viewer.

The following illustrations are taken from the same painting by the Mannerist, Rosso Fiorentino. Which I mentioned earlier , "Moses and the daughters of Jethro".Fig.14.p.35 I think this is one of the most powerful Mannerist paintings and very modern in appearance. I've

taken two figures, first Moses who is caught in the height of his fury and

mid motion resembles Longo's figure who appears to be fighting off an invisible person fig.19 p.34. The second figure, is one of the shepherds taken from the same painting who has been violently thrown to the ground in one fell swoop. Taken out of context the figure is in the same pose as Longo's "Reclining Peter", both appear dead. They look like snapshots taken from a murder investigation. "Reclining Gretchen " is similar to another figure taken from a different Rosso Fiorentino painting called " Rebecca and Eliezer at the well ".Fig 21.p.38 The figure in his painting appears sensual, pleasured and relaxed in his environment.

Fig.20.Reclining Peter. Robert Longo,1982, and a figure taken from Rebecca and Eliezer at the Well. Rosso Fiorentino.

But out of context and placed on a white background it's no longer a pleasing image. The enviromment he was in was calm and harmonious, we could'nt say that his pose was due to a violent act. But away from the scene he appears as does Gretchen to be unconscious or dead due to violence, or crushed by unseen forces within the vacuum or the pressures of life and the alienation of being a part of this life. The sixth figure is again taken from Vasari's " Immaculate Conception ".Fig.15.p.36 The woman we see is being crushed by the crowd , who are all trying to reach up to the vision of the Virgin Mary who floats above their heads. She is falling to the ground with her arms up in defense, resembling another of
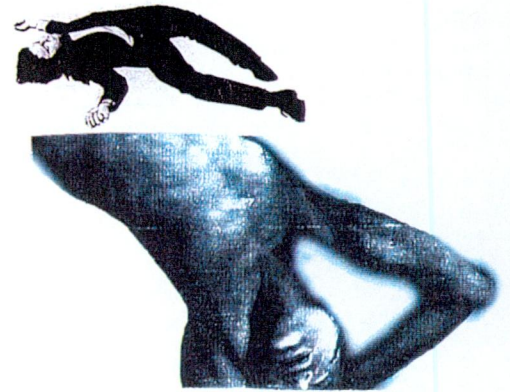

Fig.22 Reclining Gretchen. 1982-85. Robert Longo. Figure from Moses and the Daughters of Jethrol. Rosso Fiorentino

Fig.23 Untitled 1981. Robert Longo and a figure taken from Immaculate Conception. Giorgio

Longo's " Men in the Cities ". The woman *Vasari.*
in Longo's drawing raises her arm over her
face also and steps back as though she has
been hit and lost her balance. The figura
serpentinata is evident in these two
drawings, their bodies take on the flamelike
s shape and recoil in violent gestures.
Similar to the seventh figure, taken from a
painting by Jacoba da Pontormo called " The
Penitant of St. Jerome" Fig.24.p.39 in which
S.t Jerome and Longo's female figure are S
shaped in

fig.25. Untitled 1980. Robert Longo and a figure
taken from The Penitant of St.Jerome.Jacoba da
Pontormo

movement, in fact most of the figures that I've selected take on this shape.

The Mannerist arstists I have mentioned, Giovanni Bologna, Rosso Fiorentino,
Jacoba da Pontormo, Lodovico Carracci and Giorgo Vasari all seem to have the
same reasons for these gestures as Robert Longo. For all of them it is a form
of inner expression describing the mood of their time. Their peoples anger and
frustration at the sense of loss, a loss of control of their lives, no longer having
a handle on the changes taking place in society. The Mannerist paintings are
deeply religious, depicting images from the Bible. The figures have a meaning
when they are a part of these paintings, alone they take on new meanings for
the viewer. Longo's figures all look as though they have been taken out of a
painting or film and left alone as alienated individuals.

*Untitled 1982.Robert Longo and a figure
from Moses and the Daughters of Jethro Rosso Fiorentino*

Rosso Fiorentino, Moses and the Daughters of Jethro.
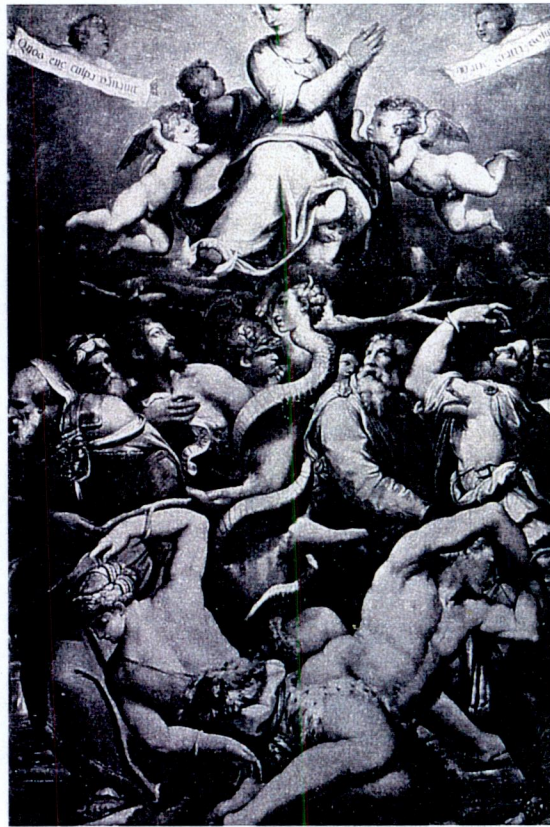
Giorgio Vasari, Immaculate Conception

Lodovico Carracci, Transfiguration.

Rosso Fiorentino, Rebecca and Eliezer at the Well.

Jacoba da Pontormo, The Penitant of St. Jerome.

Chapter 4.

Viet-Noir. "Men in the Cities"

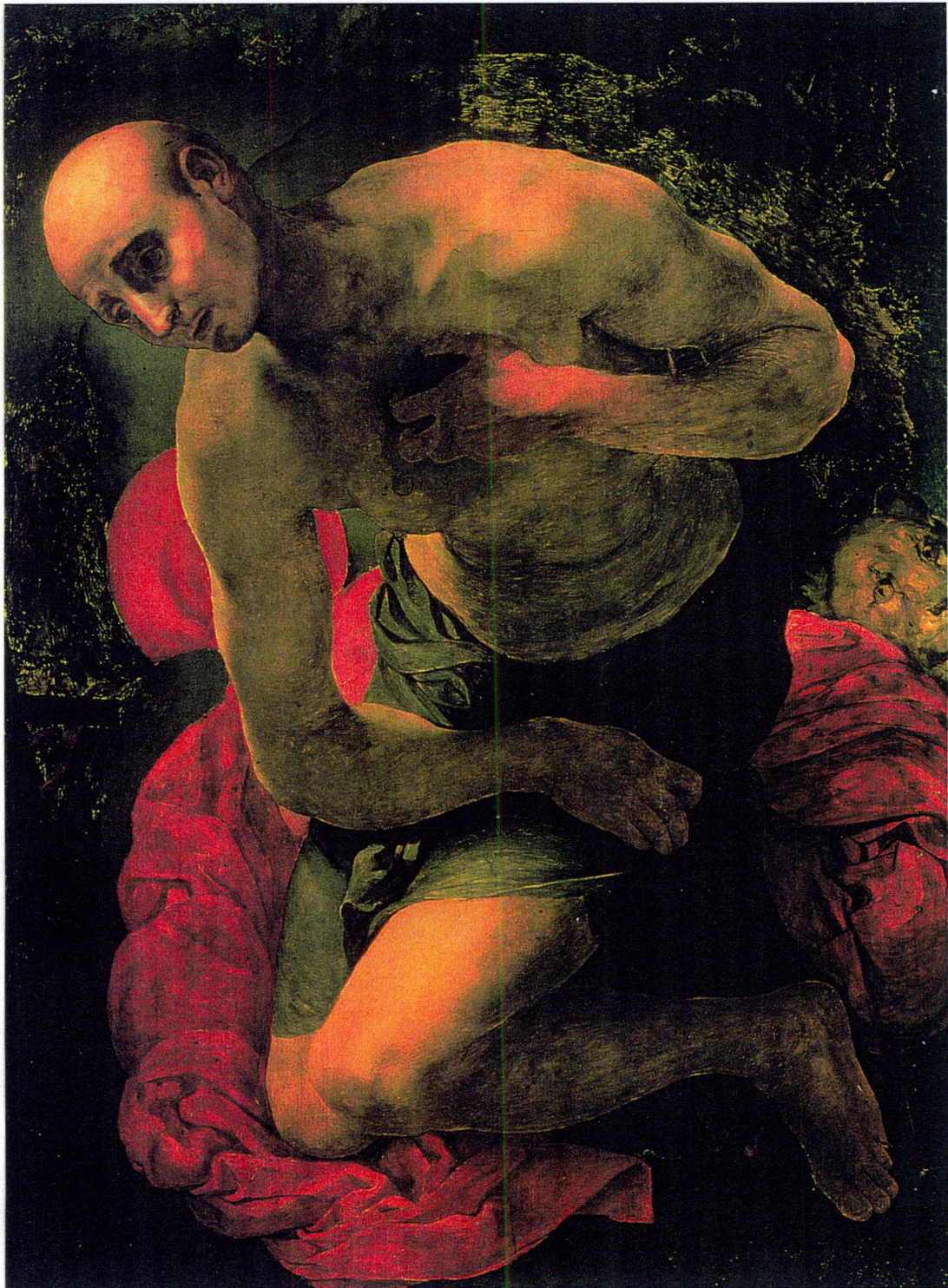It is important to point out some of the event's that were taking place in American society during Robert Longos education and prior to his artmaking career. It is important to note the mood that gripped the American people at the time and the effect it had on young artists.

The vietnam war began in 1957 just four years after his birth and ended in 1975 after his college education was complete. He grew up with its constant exposure in the media, it was the first war to be fought on daily television.

The American public were bombarded with horrific images during the war and the media at the time appeared to have more sympathy for the enemy then for their allies, they were distorting the peoples perceptions. A lot of the American people began to question the political and military strategies. The feelings amongst the people began to change rapidly, they saw now that the war was wrong. It was the first foreign war in which the United States forces failed to achieve their goals.

After World War 1 and II, the country welcomed the returning veterans as heroes. But as so many Americans opposed the U.S role in Vietnam, they criticised or ignored the returning veterans. Many people would say that the war was lost because the United States did not use its full military power and because opposition at home weakened the war effect. America was morally flawed, there was a stunned realisation that the actions taken were ineffective in achieving success. "The trauma of the vietnam war was the trauma of defeat" 1.

The country was left scarred and downtrodden, leaving the American people in a state of depression.

"the worlds most powerful nation, acted as a pitiful, helpless giant" 2.

There was a lot of anger and frustration inside the people after seeing homes ruined and lives wasted. Had these U.S leaders stubbornly made this war a test of the nations power and leadership. Were their lives in turmoil for the past eighteen years for selfish reasons, to prove a point? The people were beginning to lose faith in their country and its leaders. After the war, dislocation, disillusionment and a feeling of alienation were rife.

After graduating from high school Robert Longo went on to receive training in the State University of Buffalo, New York, where he gained a Bachelor of Fine Art degree in sculpture. The university specialised in the analysis of the media. He was exposed to performance, installation, conceptual art and video.After his studies in Buffalo were complete, he moved to Manhattan with his friend and fellow graduate, Cindy Sherman.

He spent time working on drawings of his movie heroes while Sherman worked on her untitled film stills. After a short time Longo started to see the art industry in a negative light, all he could see was profit making corporate capitalism. He found that art seemed to be caught up in a narcisstic system, self regarding and irredemably boring. It was then that he began to get more and more interested in the music and film industry rather than the mundane art scene that made him feel trapped and non productive.

Postwar cinema was the one thing that appealed to his generation most, with the revival of the film noir style and technique. Emerging from the shadows of war with the feeling of deep pessimism, people were even more attuned to film noirs qualities. Films such as the American Soldier by R.W.Fassbinder and Taxi Driver by Martin Scorsese are sombre in tone and pessimistic in mood, reflecting a darker world with haunted visions of doomed men and women, similar to Longos Men in the Cities, a series of drawings that I've been mentioning throughout the previous chapters. They depict giant figures of men and women from five to ten feet tall and there are sixty drawings in all. The doomed protagonists that populate film noir movies appear as emotionally deformed characters, like many of Longo's protagonists, they are isolated both mentally and physically from their surroundingsc. In many film noir movies and Longo's work there is an exposure of an inner darkness thats embedded in American society.

It closely resembled the feelings of the people during and after the Vietnam War, they were Longo's feelings also.

The work took on a cynically detached view of the American dream, recognising its darker side, that had an outlook that bordered on existentialism.The work of film directors like Fassbinder and Scorsese and the work of NeoPop artists like Robert Longo and Cindy Sherman during the 1970's dealt with the existentialists obsession with alienation, particularly R.W Fassbinder. His movies at times are painful to watch as he touched on a realism that affected the viewer. He once said "the only kind of realism that interests me, is that which happens in the head of the spectator, not the realism on screen" 3. He seems to have a special relationship with his audiences, he has that power to motivate the viewers thoughts and emotions, as did film noir back in the 1940's and again with it's revival in the 1970's.

This type of film viewing seemed to keep the mood lingering after the war, it did not take away the peoples disillusionment, if anything it harnessed it. Artists of the late 1970's like Longo who witnessed the Vietnam war and felt it's after effects was one of those people who watched these movies, which moved him on to create a definite style of work.

Death is often the fate of the film noir protagonists, they are the victims within a crumbling society, as it is for Longo's men and women.

"he does not control his life, life is something that controls him" 4.

I think this quote describes "Men in the Cities" perfectly. The individuals can no longer carry the day against the larger forces at work in the world. Like the film noir characters who are either manipulators or being manipulated, they cannot be freed from outside interferences in their lives, they lost the authority they once had over life.

What Longo took from a lot of these movies is their visual impact, he wanted people to get the same feeling from his drawings, that element of suspense and awe.He wants the viewer to feel that he is witnessing the height of movie gesture.I find it interesting to note how he created his photographic imagery for these drawings. He organised shooting sessions that took place on the roof of his apartment. The photographs are taken in a sixtieth of a second, "they're like this tiny, minute piece of time. Bam! It's like stopping time forever" 5

He dressed his friends in urban costumes of the time, the dark suit with white shirt for the men and black dresses for the women or a black skirt and a white blouse. His friends Cindy Sherman and Eric Bognosian for example, would dance and fall around to punk music while Longo would induce different gestures by throwing tennis balls at them or pulling them with ropes as the pictures were being taken, always at the height of the action.fig.26-28.p.44-45 He would then project these images onto a white piece of paper and trace them out with the help of his illustrator Diane Shea. He started with isolatsd figures then he moved on to triptychs, men first then women and then together. The finished product was the result of a collaborative effort with many assisstants and technicians similar to Andy Warhol who had a team of workers with him to speed up his working process. It was criticised by the art critics and many of the public as being an unartistic approach to art making. They saw it as becoming a business that was altogether too commercial. Longo never let other peoples preconceptions get in the way of what he wished to achieve. What Longo's radical new drawings did do was bring back drawing and painting that had been considered dead for a long time.

Most of Longo's images in Men in the Cities are about what life feels like for most men and women. The people that populate his art appear as attractive, upwardly mobile, middle class citizens and their poses do not seem to fit them. The figures fall and twist as though they are fighting an invisible force. Are these individuals being crushed by the system, is that what Longo is trying to say to us? The force has been described as

the manipulative power of social conditions and our culture. It's also the powerful claim that society, politics and culture have on the individuals consciousness, they co spire to determine the self. The work is dark and moody like the artists state of mind, as Longo was incredibly depressed at this time of his life. Although, this depression did help him produce some of his better work. In the late seventies he started to heighten the violence in his work and began to crop his figures as they do in the movies. Instead of seeing figures floating within a vacuum they are now pushed against the frame. Arms and legs seem to disappear out beyond the boundaries of the drawing.

As I've mentioned before, Longo's work takes on a lot of Manneristic qualities. The Mannerists had a tendency to the abnormal for the normal, figures have unnatural proportions and exaggerated foreshortening. Their figurative action is wild and feverish similar to the action we see in Longo's drawings. Fassbinders films could also be described as Manneristic in style, with the characters violent gestures and movement in the "American Soldier". Longo and Fassbinder manipulated their subjects to extremes as the Mannerists did. For Longo "the frustration of having such a love for movies and then to make art that does'nt move", "these drawings are much about making something that does'nt move, move" 6. This is what Longo wanted to achieve in his work, the work appears to be a part of the spectators real world. The people are playing a part in life that they wished they were'nt a part of. They are despairing beings, conscious that they are the product of a mass culture.

For every male in the series there is a female and when they are being exhibited they are placed on walls opposite each other, which leaves the viewer in the intimidating position between the two. The drawings produce a natural desire to figure out the dramas. Is it a portrayal of a world in devastation with a culture that has gone awry?.
Are these people part of a society in the process of self destruction. Is it a dance to the beat of New Wave music, do the gestures echoe performances by the artist David Byrne and other New Wave musicians? Or is it a dance of death based on the Fassbinder influence of violence.

Robert Longo, Untitled 1982.

Robert Longo.Untitled, 1981

Conclusion

In my thesis I've presented the reader with an analysis of Robert Longo's early art making career with the production of his Men in the Cities series which began in 1979.

I've given an account of the many influences on his work, beginning with the arrival of Pop Art in the 1960's and Andy Warhol, an artist who opened up new avenues for experimentation in art, he was the first artist to combine art and the entertainment industry. I think that Andy Warhols involvement in the music scene during the sixties gave birth to the NeoPop, New Wave scene in New York in the mid 1970's, which I feel is in many ways closely linked to seventeenth century Baroque art. Like NeoPop, Baroque was a movement which wanted to engage a wider audience to view their work. Baroque artists were involved in stage performance and music also, it was a vital form of self expression and a way to interact with the people instead of remaining within the confines of the artworld. NeoPop art combined all of the arts, theatre, dance and music into a unified whole, dealing expressively with issues and subject matter of contemporary life. It diminished what was left of the Modernist ideal, the suppression of social and cultural influence was no longer possible, they had created and entered a new Postmodern era.

This was a very important time for Robert Longo. His involvement in the music scene gave him a new lease of life, the new wave scene provided him with a style of work that contributed to the production of his Men in the Cities series. I make the comparison between these drawings and David Byrnes performances as a New Wave musician.

There was a particular type of movement and expression to New Wave. David Byrnes gestures were exaggerated and stilted in beat to his music, his movements are similar to the movements of Longo's protagonists in Men in the Cities.

The only difference I can see is the aspect of violence in his drawings which David Byrnes performances do not pose. The people that populate Longo's drawings appear to have agonised facial expressions, suggesting that it has more to do with a violent dance or a dance of death

The violence in Longo's work I feel has more to do with his tormented state of mind in the mid seventies due to many different elements in particular the effects of the Vietnam War. His work seems to be filled with anger and resentment due to the disillusionment and bitterness his country was feeling as a result of the war. A war which left himself and the rest of his country in a dark, pessimistic mood.

Longo had only just graduated from art school at a time when the country was suffering from postwar depression. He found a sense of comfort in the movie theatre. His

introduction to the films of R.W. Fassbinder seemed to embed in him this element of violence which we see emerge in one of his first pieces of work called "An American Soldier" and then with "Men in the Cities". The combination of the effect of the Vietnam War and R.W Fassbinder movies seemed to trigger the production of these powerfully violent series of drawings. The violent gesture in both Fassbinders movies and Robert Longo's drawings, for me, made significant connections to the work of the 16th century Mannerists like Fiorentino and Pontormo. The upsurge of Manneristic violence in Longo's work is an expression of his passion and desire to show the mood of his time, a time when the future seemed bleak. The violence in his drawings portrays mans desire to escape from his disillusionment and feelings of alienation.

For Robert Longo, David Byrne and R.W. Fassbinder each had a desire to express the mood of their time and express their true self, unknowingly presenting us with many Manneristic characteristics in their work. I feel that in the mid seventies, the NeoPop New Wave scene which we saw, was a revival of post Renaissance Mannerism. The figura serpentinata seems to be the main element running through all of these artists work. The violent S shaped contorted figure is in David Byrnes New Wave performances, R.W. Fassbinders "American Soldier" and Robert Longo's Men In the Cities. Would it be better to describe his work as Neo Mannerism rather than NeoPop art.

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