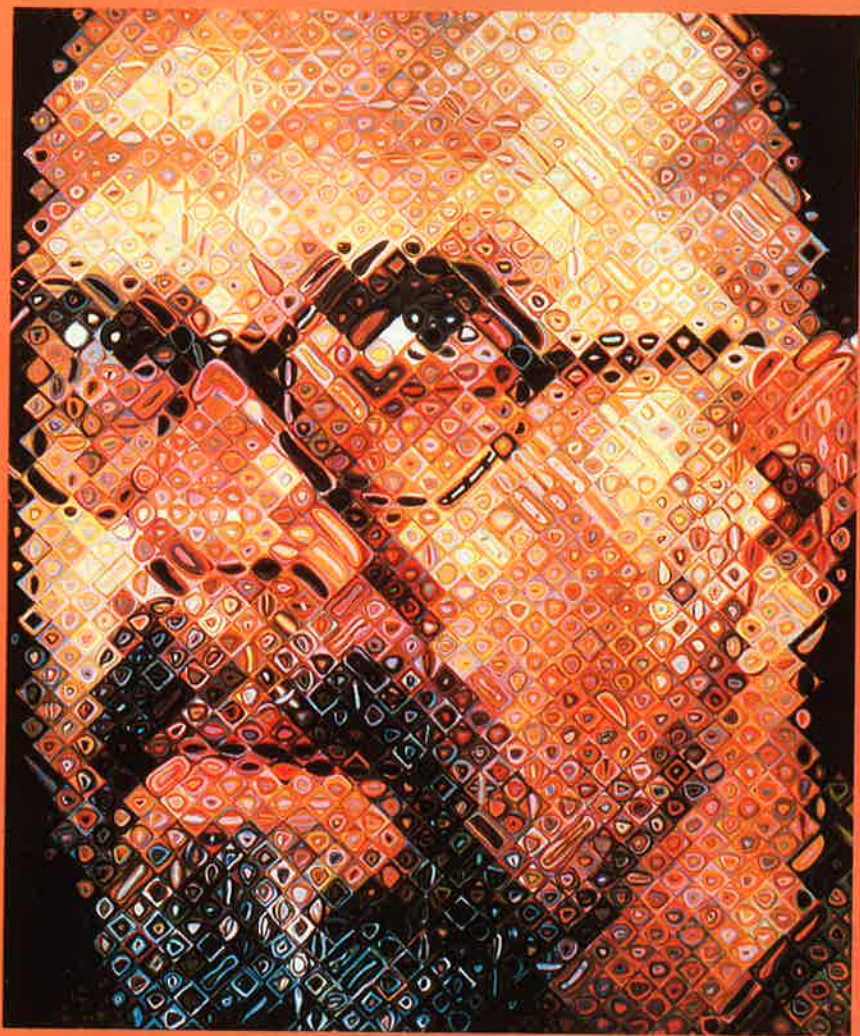


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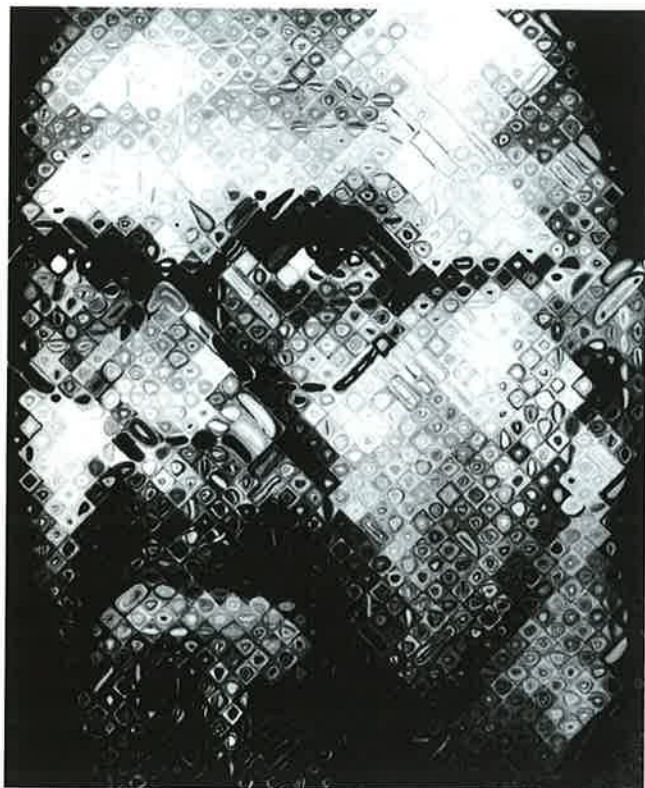
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"CHUCK CLOSE, Self-Portrait" 1997. Oil on canvas. Private Collection, NY

FOCUS ON CHUCK CLOSE AT MOMA

Focus on Close



"Self-Portrait" 1997. Oil on canvas. Private Collection, NY

“**C**huck Close” a retrospective of the New York-based painter Chuck Close’s career opened February 25 and continues through May 26, 1998 at the Museum of Modern Art. The survey, which displays the broad variety of materials and techniques used by Close in his highly influential career, was directed by Robert Storr, Curator, Dept. of Painting and Drawing.

Composed of over 90 paintings, drawings and prints, the show offers the first opportunity to view the artist’s painterly canvases of the last 17 years in the context of his minimalist, process-driven and conceptual earlier work. Additional insight into Close’s artistic development during this time frame is provided by “**Focus: Chuck Close Editioned Works**”, an exhibition of 35 of his prints, on exhibit in the Museum’s print galleries, selected by Deborah Wye, Chief Curator, Department of Prints and Illustrated Books.

Close is an influential portrait maker whose monumental head shots of distinguished fellow artists and anonymous sitters are often associated with Photorealism. Installed chronologically, the exhibit traces the artist’s career from his first signature painting

"Big Self-Portrait" 1967-68, to "Self-Portrait" 1997 – a vividly colored work (shown on the opposite page). Close is a rigorous technician whose labor-intensive grids of people take many months and sometimes years to produce. The painting titled "Robert /104,072 (1972-74)", for example, is an amalgam of more than one million marks in the 104, 072 spaces of the painting's grid. The million marks were necessary to render textural and tonal subtleties of flesh, knitted fabric and shiny eyeglass frames in black paint.

Close's work can be simultaneously mesmerizing and alienating. His paintings are derived from passport-style photos, which he makes himself. His portrait lens records the subject with shallow depth of field and a consistent blur to the nose and the sides and top of the head. This blur, which often manifests itself in a similar way when a subject moves as the photographer snaps the shutter, contemporizes what is otherwise a pointillist painting technique. Echoes of the photo machine, the computer imaging process become part of this specialized painting vocabulary. Elements in the original photo-maquette, such as the nasal and aural extremities of the head going out-of-focus, become unnerving and grotesque when enlarged. The most alarming visual information provides the viewer with the reality that Close is both the photographic alpha and the painterly omega of the enlarged, laboratory-like specimens on the canvas. The intimate moment of the small format head shots, created by Close the photographer is violated when Close the painter enlarges them on canvas.

"Close has created a psychological zone where it is possible to violate the privacy of another human to an unprecedented degree," says Storr.

Close spent the first decade of his career in controlled revolt against himself

and his paintings. In 1966 he abruptly lost the painter's hand and then gradually brought it back in 1978 in his pictures as fingerprints for a fingerpainting series. "Fanny/Fingerpainting"(1985), an example of his fintertip technique, is a simultaneously grand and delicate portrait of his grandmother-in-law.

After 1986, Chuck Close chose to paint portraits of his creative peers. The result is a pantheon of late 20th century American artists. Kiki Smith. Janet Fish, Paul Cadmus, John Chamberlain, are among the notables whose portraits attest to Close's pluralistic embrace of the art world. With this work, perhaps in some ways also a living testament of the support of his peers, Close let the long-suppressed gestural side of his sensibility loose. In "Lucas II" (1987), for example, Close rendered Lucas Samaras in an atypical radiating grid. The looser the grid is in this series of paintings, the more painterly the manner. But the command of the brush and paint remain firmly in the artist's control.

Close was born in Monroe, Washington, in 1940, and received his B.A. at the University of Washington. At Yale University, where he matriculated in the Masters Art Program from 1962-64, he was awarded a Fullbright scholarship to Vienna. He relocated in New York in the late 1960s. In 1988, a congenitally weak blood vessel in his spinal column ruptured, paralyzing him from the neck down. Close adapted himself to his new condition without artistic compromise.

Donna Cameron is a New York-based painter and media artist whose films and videos are included in the permanent collection of the Museum of Modern Art, in New York, NY. She is a Visiting Professor at NYU Film School, Tisch School of the Arts.