

SCHOLASTIC

ART

Working
with
Portraits

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Chuck Close

SCHOLASTIC



COVER: Chuck Close (b. 1940) in front of Mark, 1979. Photos © Jack Mitchell.

SCHOLASTIC ART

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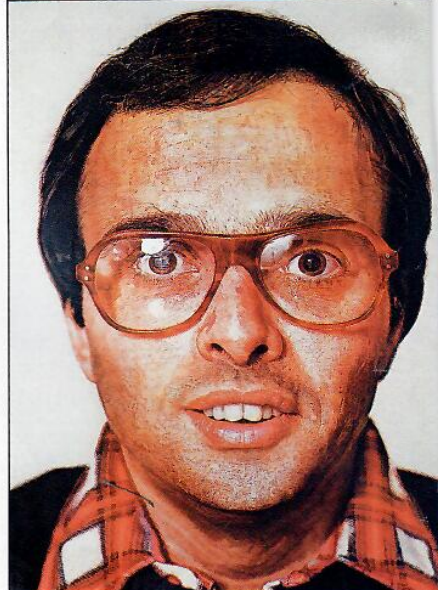
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Face to Face

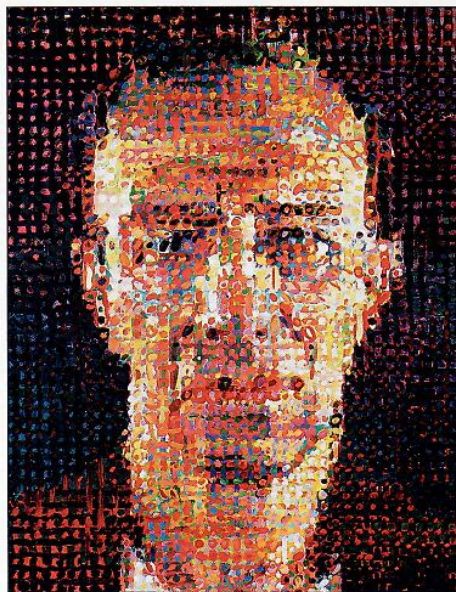


Phil
1968, 108" x 84"

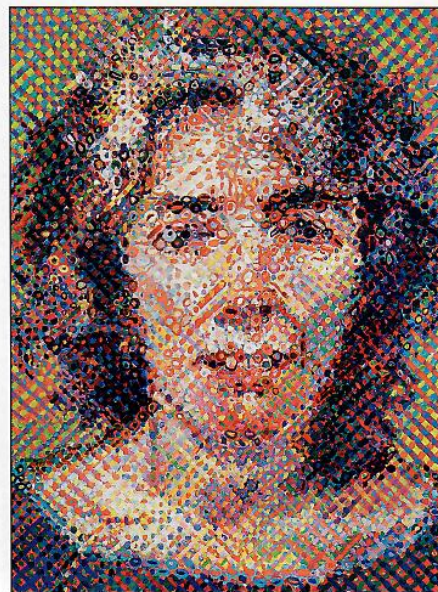


Mark
1979, 108" x 84"

Chuck C



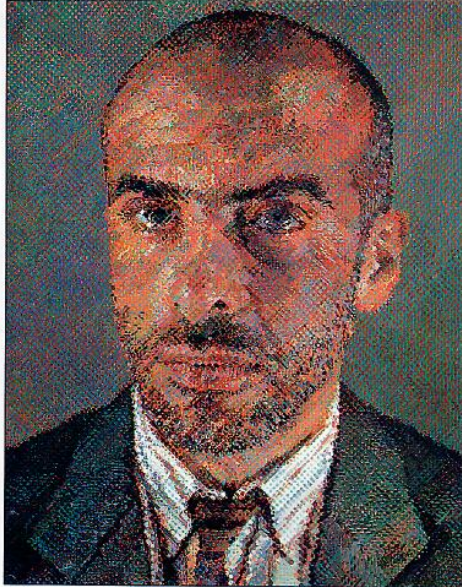
Alex
1989, 36" x 30"



Elizabeth
1989, 72" x 60"

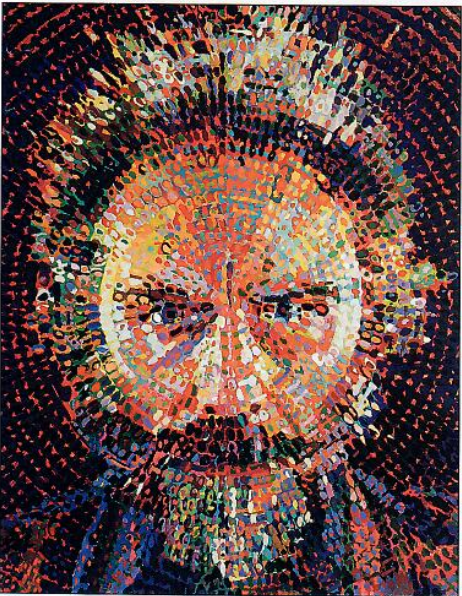
Photographs courtesy Pace Wildenstein Gallery.

e with



Francesco
1987-88 100" x 84"

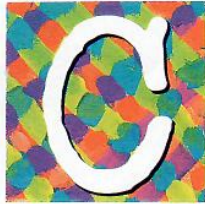
lose



Lucas
1992-93, 46" x 36"

“My real subjects are not people.
I paint portraits of photographs.”

—CHUCK CLOSE



Contemporary American painter Chuck Close is over six feet tall. Yet each of the many heads he has painted tower over him. Look again at the cover to feel the impact of a face this large.

Chuck Close has been painting one subject—the human face—for nearly 30 years. What is unusual about these faces is that each is the size of a wall and none of them are really portraits. Why does he paint this way and why have these faces made Close one of the most important artists working today?

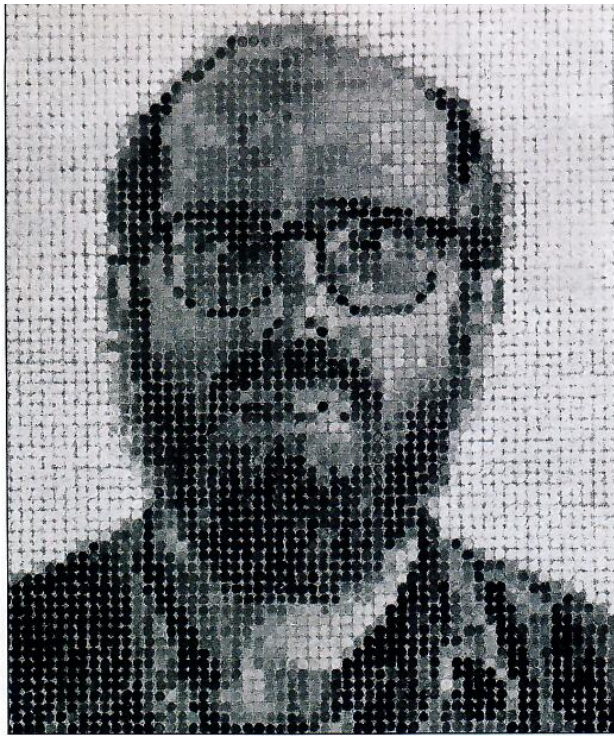
When Chuck Close began painting in the 1960s, he was influenced by a group known as “pop” artists. They were the first to develop art forms based on images from “popular” culture. They felt the media had become so important that images from TV, films, and magazines were as real for many people as their own lives. With his enormous, detailed portraits Chuck Close points out society’s dependency on second-hand visual experiences.

None of the paintings on these pages are traditional portraits. These works tell us nothing about their subjects’ lives, feelings, character, profession, or social status. They are paintings of photos of faces. The overwhelming detail forces us to think, not about the subject, but about the image itself—how and why it was made.

Close began painting heads in the 1960s, working from small photos. His first faces, like *Phil* and *Mark* (top left and center), were made with an airbrush (a small spray-gun) to duplicate a photo’s mechanical quality. He **magnified** every blemish and imperfection, **changing the focus** of each feature as a camera would. Later, as you can see in works like *Francesco* (top right), Close’s images began to loosen up. He started using the **textures** made by brush strokes. His most recent images (bottom row) are built from specks of color that can be “read” as faces only from a distance.

Since the process of creation is as important to Chuck Close as the finished image, his works could actually be paintings of anything. But would any image be as powerful as a nine-foot-high human face? As the artist says, “I paint heads because heads matter to everybody. If you paint a face big enough, it’s hard to ignore!”



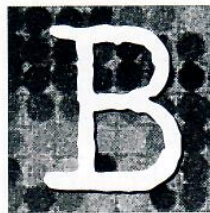


"Human heads are things people care about. You can't mess around with them"
— Chuck Close

TOP LEFT: *Self-Portrait*, 1980.
 Fingerprint (stamp-pad ink). 30" x 22"
 Pace Wildenstein Gallery.

TOP RIGHT: *Self-Portrait*, 1979.
 Conte crayon and pencil. 30" x 22"
 Pace Wildenstein Gallery.

Photo © Jack Mitchell.



Born Charles Close in 1940 in the State of Washington, the artist was an only child. From the age of 4, Close knew he was going to be an artist. "I was always single-minded. If you know what you want to do with your life, it saves a lot of time." When he was in his teens, Close had a muscular weakness and wasn't very good at sports. Learning disabilities made school difficult for him. But he discovered he could draw better than anyone else. As he puts it, "I drew to entertain my friends. And I had a lot of support from my family; it set me apart from other people and made me feel special."

After graduating from high school, Close went to the University of Washington. "I realized when I got into college that I could make the system work for me in a way it hadn't in high school," he says. He graduated with the highest grade point average in the art school. He then attended Yale Graduate School and got a grant to study in Europe. In 1967, Close moved to New York City and began painting from small black-and-white photos.

During the next 20 years, Close became world famous for the giant faces he created. Then, at the end of 1988, the artist was hospitalized due to the sudden collapse of a spinal artery. Since that time he has been in a wheelchair and paralyzed from the neck down. During the past six years, he has painted a series of

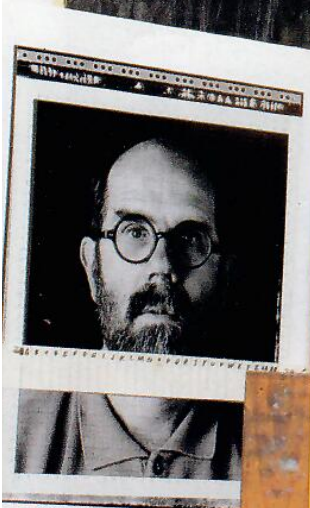
portraits many critics have called the best work he has ever done. The artist says, "Sometimes I'll roll by a mirror and I'm shocked to see myself in a wheelchair, but I've learned to surmount problems since I was a kid. I had to recover enough to paint. There is nothing else I can do. There is nothing else I *want* to do."

Since he began painting heads, Close has used his own face more than any other. He says, "I have been just as ruthless with my own image. It has given me an idea of how my subjects must feel." He always uses the same **frontal, head-on, passport-photo view**, with **unsmiling lips and deadpan eyes**. In spite of his disability, he works in much the same way as always, painting his huge portraits while sitting in a forklift (right) that can be lowered and raised. He uses a **grid** to enlarge the photo to the size of his canvas, then builds the image block by block (it takes more than a year to do a large portrait). He has used this **system of squares** to reproduce his own features in a number of media, among them crayon (top right), airbrush (left), and fingerprints (top left). This work is a kind of **double self-portrait**, made by using an inkpad to stamp out an image of his face with his fingerprint.

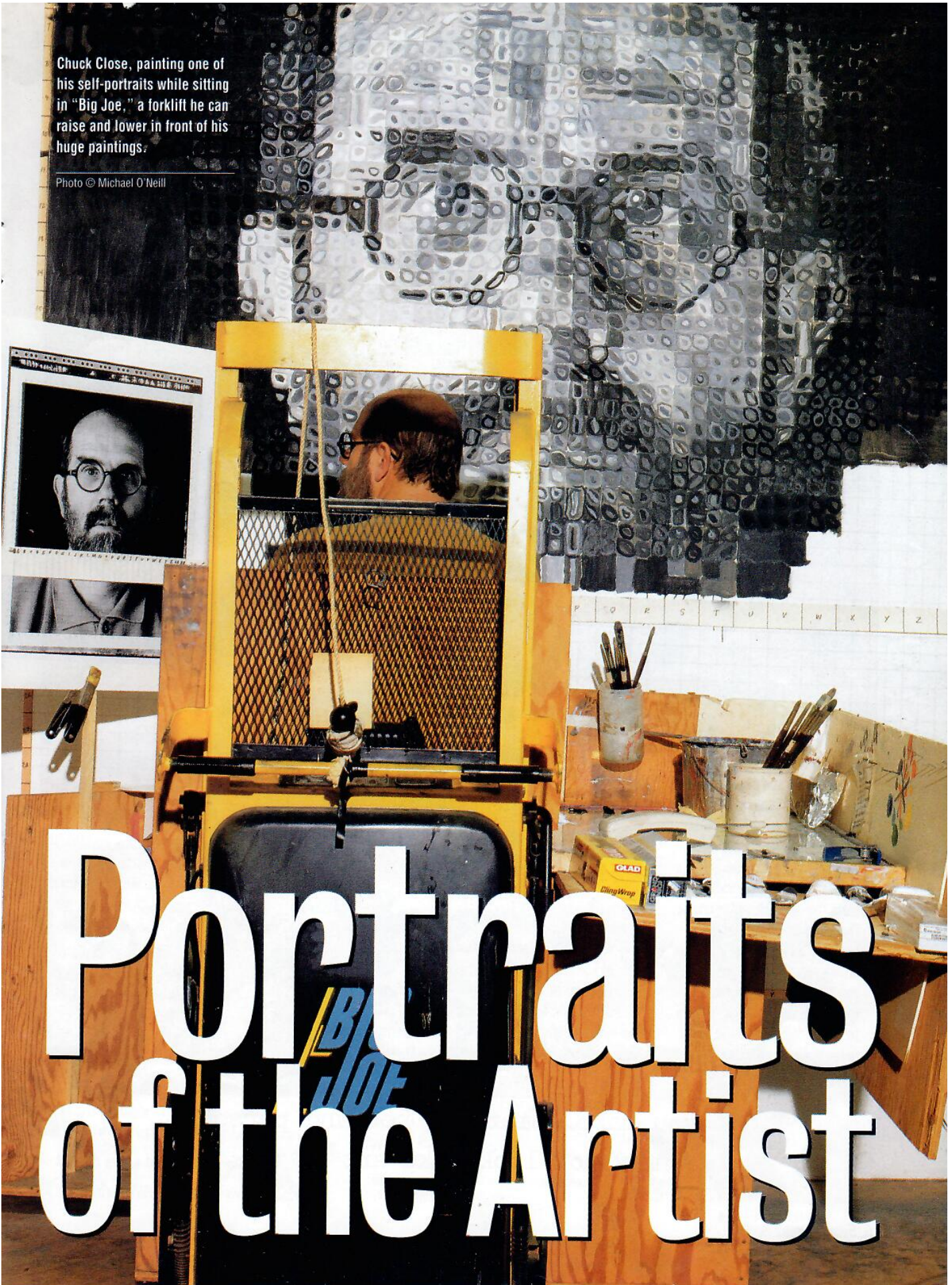
Close's fingerprint faces can be grotesque. But as the artist once said about the reactions to his portraits, "Before I painted my wife, she complained that if I didn't do a painting of her, people would think I don't love her. Then I painted her. Now she thinks that people will think I must really hate her."

Chuck Close, painting one of his self-portraits while sitting in "Big Joe," a forklift he can raise and lower in front of his huge paintings:

Photo © Michael O'Neill



Portraits of the Artist



MASTERPIECE
OF THE
MONTH

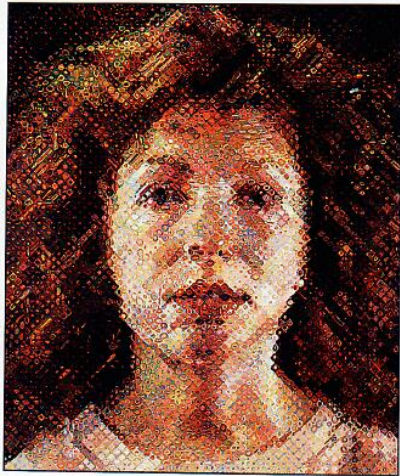
Preview



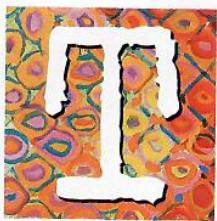
Close based his portraits of April (above right) and Bill (pages 8-9) on a diagonal grid. As you can see from this detail, each diamond-shaped unit is a small abstract painting. When the viewer is near the portrait, it looks like an abstract landscape. From a distance, the image becomes an enormous face. The artist says, "I build a painting by putting little marks together—some look like hot dogs, some look like doughnuts—the way a writer makes a novel by slamming words together."

"If you make something new and personal,
it may not look like art at all."

—CHUCK CLOSE



A Close Encounter



Two decades ago, no artist was riding higher than Chuck Close. Critics called him one of the greatest portrait painters ever. His giant “mug shots” sold

for six figures. Close was world renowned when, suddenly, he was struck down. Just before Christmas, in 1988, an artery in his spinal cord collapsed. Doctors still have no idea why, at the time, he was totally paralyzed from the neck down. After months of work, Close regained some control in his arms and legs, but he would never regain the use of his hands. He knew he had to find another way to paint. He found that with a brush strapped to his hand, he could work paint on a canvas, and after months of practice, he taught his arm muscles to take the place of his hands.

CC: When you're trapped in a body that doesn't work, it's really an amazing experience. But once you know how to make art, you figure out some way to smear the stuff on, even if you have to spit it on the canvas.

Two years later, Close was back in his Manhattan studio, working on a portrait of his friend artist April Gornick (above). It would be a four-month process, alive with color and built by dividing the canvas into tiny squares and filling them in one by one.

CC: These paintings are built more like someone would knit or crochet than the way someone traditionally paints.

So is each grid a little painting?

CC: Yes, and I have a little joy with each little

painting. There's a celebratory aspect to these pieces. There are a lot of things I can't do that I used to do, but I can still paint.

And paint his best work yet, according to the critics. But those who know him are not surprised. Close likes challenges. Long before his disability, he made a practice of setting up his own obstacles. How much paint did you use for this portrait, Joe? (below)

CC: I used less than two tablespoons of paint for the whole painting—it's the artist Joe Zucker. He wanted to look like a used-car salesman, so he changed the way he looked before I painted him. Most people have trouble dealing with the results, so they change the way they look right after I paint them.

That doesn't bother you?

CC: It bothers them. That's why I don't do commissioned portraits. If someone's ego is big enough to get a nine-foot-high painting of themselves, they'd want their nose straightened, teeth capped, skin smoothed. I never wanted to get into that.

Having just finished his tenth painting since his hospitalization, Close is back at the top of the art world. He tries to do everything he did before, in spite of the difficulty of even the simplest task now. But he prefers life in his studio, painting to rock music.

CC: In a world where I have little control over things going on around me, I can at least control the world in my own studio.

From the program Prime Time, originally broadcast August 27, 1992. Courtesy, ABC News

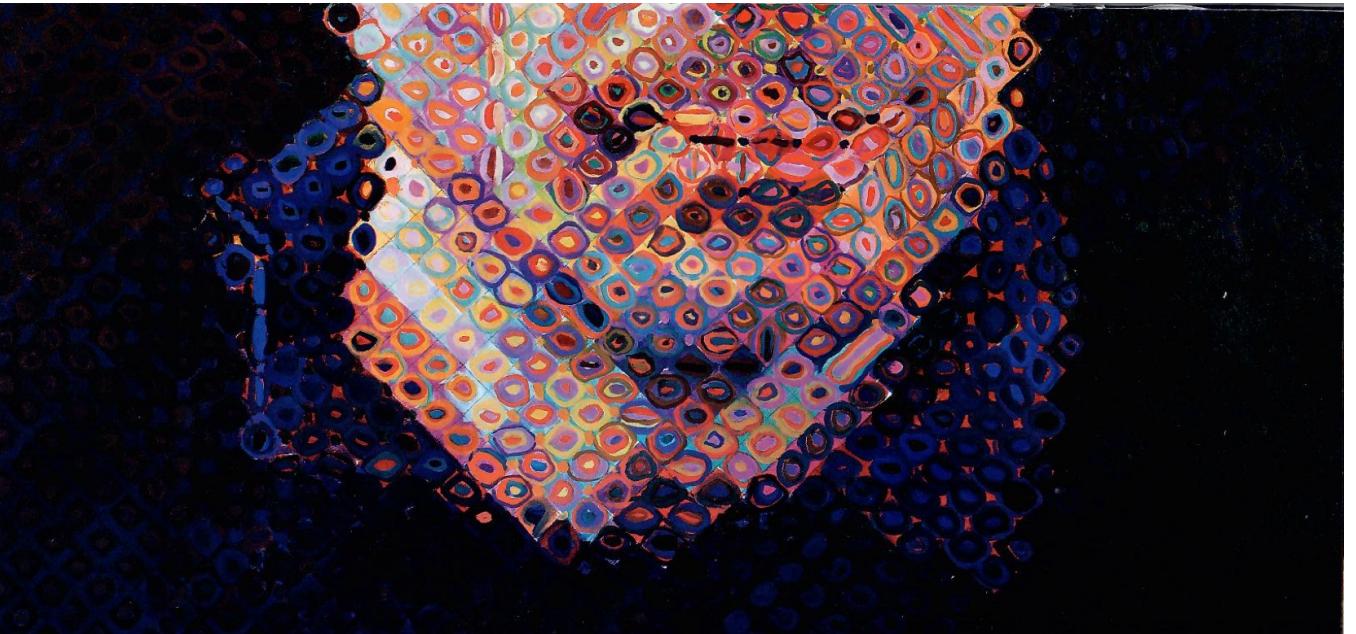
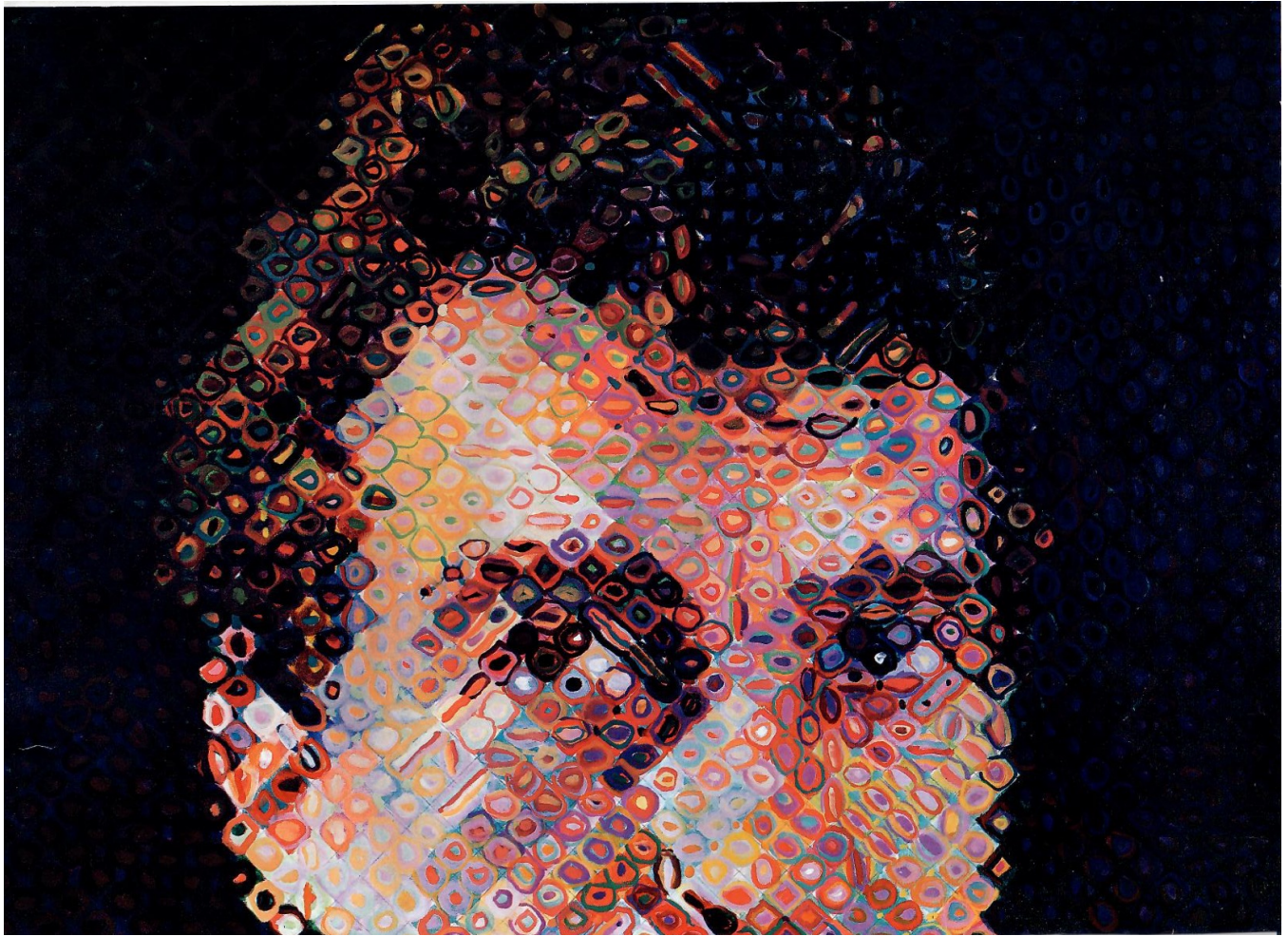
Chuck Close's subjects are usually friends—like painter April Gornick (left) and photographer William Wegman (pages 8-9)—who are also well-known in the contemporary art world

April, 1990-91. 108" x 84" Photograph courtesy Pace Wildenstein Gallery.

Compare an early portrait by Close (below), with a recent one (above, left) done more than 20 years later.

Joe, 1969. 108" x 84" Photograph courtesy Pace Wildenstein Gallery.





Chuck Close b. 1940. *Bill*, 1990. Oil on canvas, 72" x 60". Photograph courtesy Pace Wildenstein Gallery.

SCHOLASTIC
ART

Bill

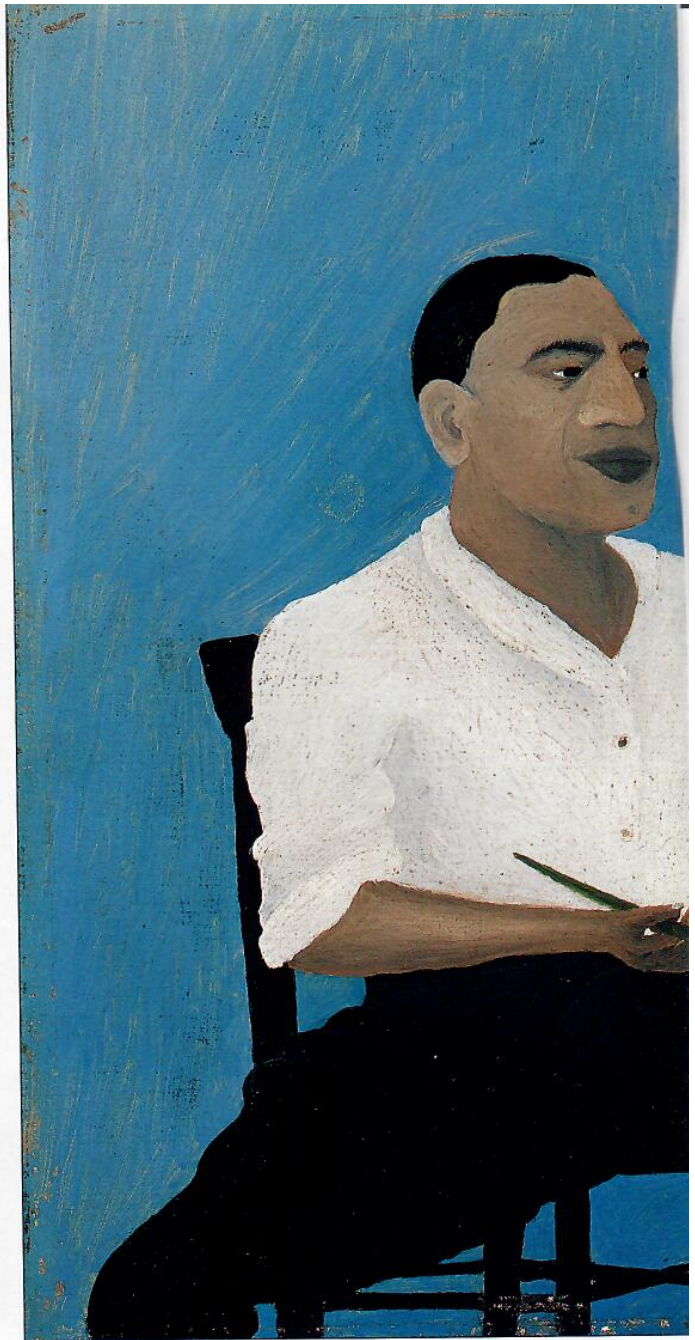
by Chuck Close

MASTERPIECE
OF THE
MONTH # 4

"I was trying to do away with the traditional portrait, where the features are very important
—I wanted to make every part of the painting of equal importance."

ART SPOTLIGHT

PORTRAITS,
THEN AND NOW:
Three artists who have
represented the human face.



Paintings that look like Photos

Compare the 16th century painting (above) by German artist Hans Holbein with the faces in this issue by Chuck Close. Which portrait is more flattering? Which do you think the subject would prefer? Which would you call more “realistic?”

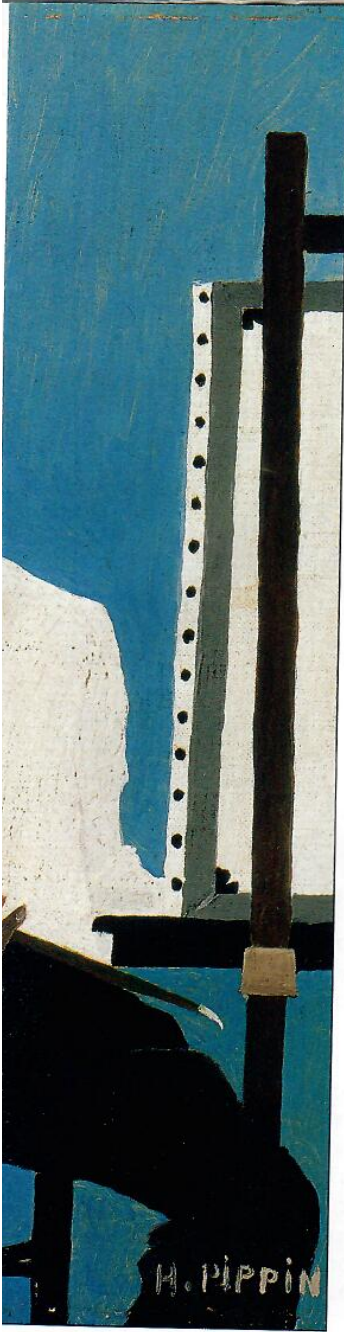
Before the invention of the camera, most portraits were created primarily as a record of a person’s appearance. Portraits like this one of 16th century

English statesman Thomas More, usually included visual clues to the sitter’s identity and status. More, who was lord chancellor of England, wears rich robes, has the seal of office around his neck, and holds an official document. A portrait like this that is also a great work of art, expresses its subject’s personality and character. Unlike Chuck Close’s giant paintings of faces in which each detail is as impor-

tant as every other detail, this portrait has one main **center of interest**—the face. It is the **focus** of the whole painting. Every other element, the hands, the circular necklace, the drapery in back, is carefully **composed** to draw attention to More’s conflicted yet calm and determined expression. (More was later to defy his former friend King Henry VIII, and was eventually executed for treason).

In what ways does the 16th century painting (above, left) resemble a modern photograph?

Hans Holbein (1497-1543).
Sir Thomas More, c. 1527.
© The Frick Collection, NY, NY.



Painting the Inner Person

At the beginning of this century, as photography started to take over the functions of realistic portraiture, painters began to create new kinds of portraits. Twentieth century African

Artist Horace Pippin told people that his physical disability "Brought out all the art in me."

Horace Pippin (1888-1946). *Self-Portrait*, 1941. Oil. 14" x 11". Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, NY.

American painter Horace Pippin had no formal art training and he was not interested in making paintings that were photographically realistic. Pippin didn't begin painting until he was in his 40's, after he was disabled in the First World War. He taught himself to paint by holding his brush in his paralyzed right hand and pushing it across the canvas with his left hand. In his self portrait (left), Pippin has carefully arranged a few simplified

shapes, selecting the most important details to create a work of great emotional power. The white stylized shape of the figure's shirt stands out against the bright, intense hue of the blue background. The only diagonal line in the composition leads the viewer's eye to the painting's focal point, the artist's face. His head is framed by the verticals of the easel on the right, the chair on the left, and the horizontal rungs at the bottom of the painting.

Photos that look like Paintings

Chuck Close's art shows us how we take photographic images for granted. But, hard as it is to believe, there was actually a time when photography didn't even exist. It was only in the middle of the 19th century, when the camera was invented, that ordinary people were able to have likenesses of themselves and their families. One of the first portrait photographers—Englishwoman Julia Margaret Cameron—took the photo, above right. She began taking pictures at the age of 48 when her daughter gave her a camera. Her husband was a British civil



servant, part of whose job was to entertain well-known artists, writers, and politicians and Julia Cameron was able to get many of them to sit for her. Photography was still a new art form, so most photographers used traditional painting devices such as oval frames and formal poses. Cameron wanted to express her sitter's character, so she photographed a profile view of this woman. Cameron was one of the first portrait photographers to use the purely photographic techniques of dramatic side-lighting and

Compare this black and white photograph (right) to Chuck Close's black and white paintings on pages 2 and 7.

Julia Margaret Cameron (1818-1879).
Mrs. Herbert Duckworth
(Virginia Woolf's mother), 1867.

ARTIST OF
THE MONTH

Carrie Williams: CREATING PORTRAITS

We select our Artist of the Month from among Scholastic Award winners. To enter, ask your teacher to write to the Scholastic Art and Writing Awards, 555 Broadway, New York, NY 10012-3999 for entry deadlines and rules books. *Scholastic Art* magazine does not have a separate competition.

■ **How did you first get interested in art?**

When I was around 12, people at my school said I could draw. That made me feel good, so I took some art classes. Then I was accepted at Suitland Center for the Arts, a special high school for students interested in art. When I started to attend that school, I knew that art was what I was going to do for the rest of my life.

■ **Where did you get your idea for this award-winning print?**

There was a girl in my high school who never stayed still. I wanted to do a portrait of her because she's such a lively, animated person. I wanted to use color and contrast to capture her boldness and her dynamism and the fact that she's like that even when she's not moving.

■ **How did you go about making the print?**

I did a color drawing, then turned it into a *multi-drop mono-*

type which is a kind of print. I used translucent inks and the three primary colors: yellow, blue, and magenta. The other colors come from where the different inks have printed on top of each other. I worked from light to dark—any white in the print is the white of the paper.

I began by doing an outline of my original drawing on plastic. Then I rolled out my first color ink—yellow—using a flexible piece of plastic as a printing plate. I soaked a piece of white paper in water, blotted it, and put the plate on top with the ink side down. I ran both of them through the press and the ink transferred onto the paper. I did a lot of trial and error pieces before I was able to get the other two colors to line up right. If they don't line up, your print looks like a 3-D comic book.

■ **Why did you choose the colors you did?**

I wanted to emphasize red because it's a very bold color and

would express the model—Rukiyat's—personality. I was actually surprised by how bright the red was, because you never really know what you're going to get in printmaking. It's like opening a present. You can peel back the plate and find something underneath you didn't expect at all. The blue is really the most important color—it pulls the image together and unifies the whole portrait.

■ **Do you do a lot of portraits?**

I've done several portraits in a number of media—paintings, drawings, and prints. I enjoy doing portraits because it's a way to bring out a person's personality. I try to get a likeness, but that's not my main concern. The most important thing for me is to capture the person's attitude and facial expression. That's why I wanted to work with Rukiyat, because she's a one-of-a-kind person and I wanted to express her individuality. I usually use the model's

Nineteen-year-old Carrie Williams was a senior at Suitland Center for the Arts in Forestville Maryland when she did the Scholastic Art Award winning portrait below. Carrie wants to “do what she loves and still make a living,” so she is not only majoring in fine arts at Moore College of Art and Design in Philadelphia, she’s also getting her teaching certificate. “I want to be an artist because I just can’t imagine doing anything else. My art is who I am. When I sit down and start creating, I feel more like myself than at any other time.”



I enjoy doing portraits because it's a way to bring out a person's personality. I try to get a likeness, but that's not my main concern.

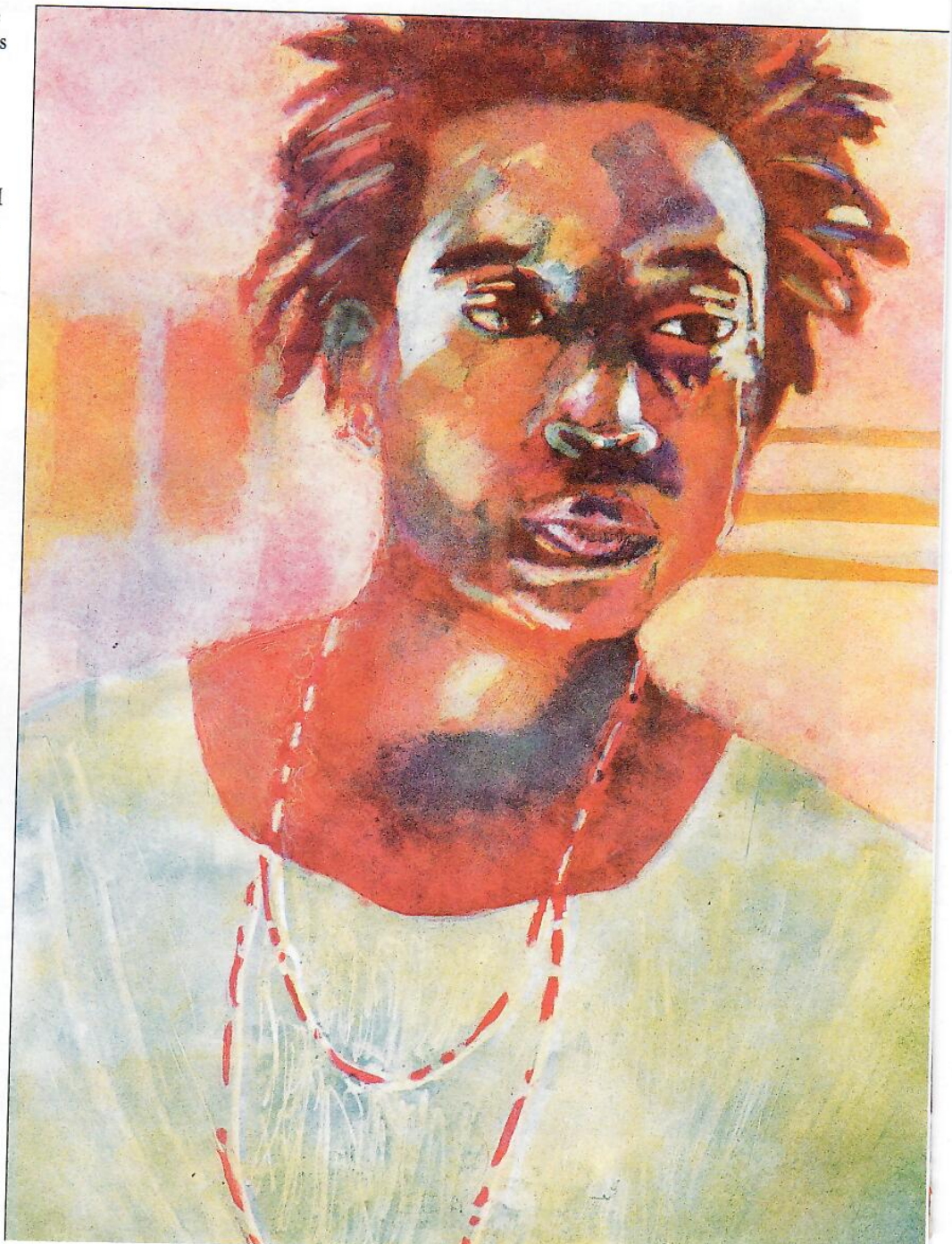
name to title my pieces because I don't know how else to express the way I'm feeling while I'm making the image.

■ **Are you familiar with Chuck Close's work?**

Yes, Close is my favorite artist. I was thrilled to find out I was going to be in an issue about him. When I look at his work, I'm relieved to see that somebody is making a living as a portrait artist and is also making portraits in a unique way. I love the fact that he takes an image of a person's face and seems to make it into a puzzle. It looks like a puzzle when you stand up close, but when you step back you're able to read it very clearly. I also love many of the old masters. I like to look at Rembrandt's portraits because he puts such character into his figures.

■ **Do you have any advice for other art students?**

I've found there's no harm in taking a chance with your work. If you do something you're good at for a long period of time, you get bored. But if you try to solve different problems—do a series and try to work off the last piece you've done—then you can learn by your mistakes and your art can grow. Developing a portfolio is very important because you can show colleges the diversity of your work. And I also find that taking risks helps me enjoy my art more.



MAKING A DOUBLE SELF-PORTRAIT

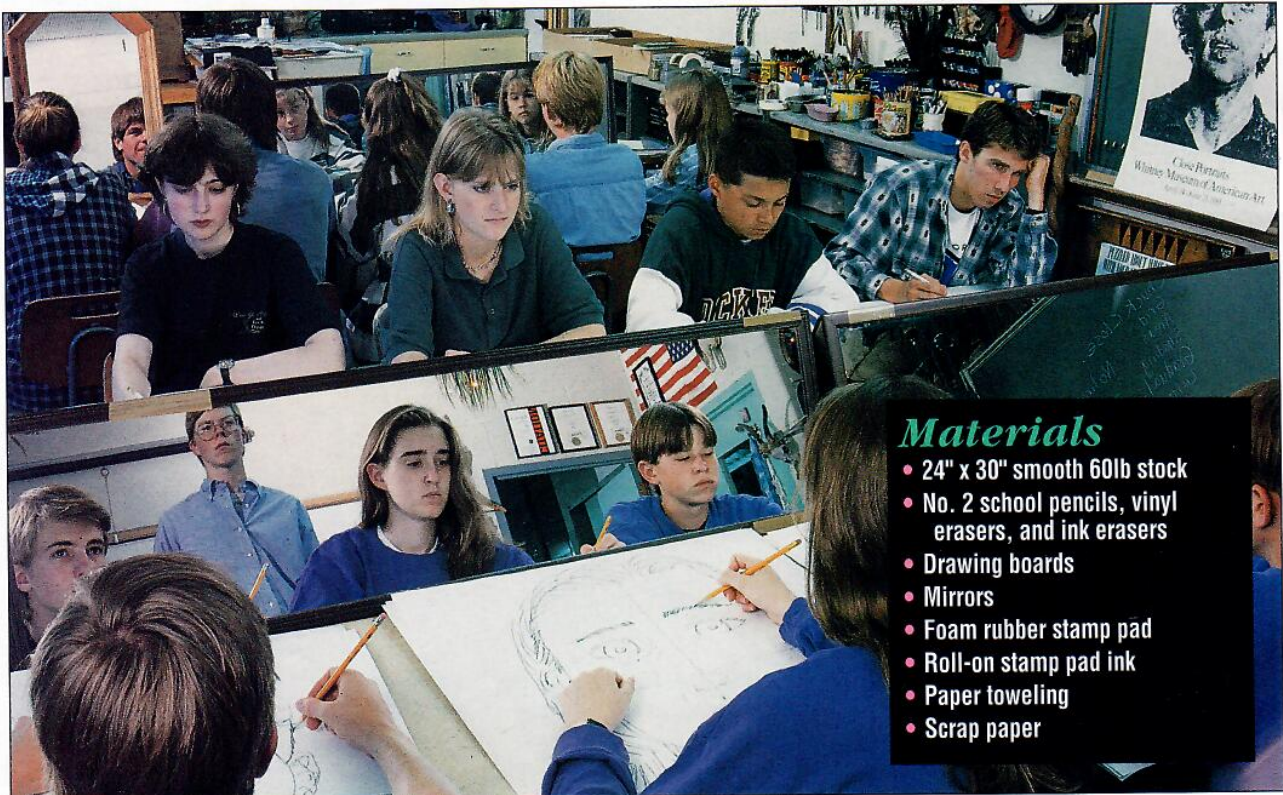
Use some of Chuck Close's ideas to create a monumental head.



Chuck Close says he likes painting from live models but “since my paintings take 12-14 months, it wouldn’t work. We’d drive each other crazy and, during that time, models would change.” So Close works from photos and his own features. His dozens of self-portraits include a very personal series of “double self-portraits,” made by stamping out images of his face with his own fingerprints. Close *repeats* and *builds up* these fingerprints the way he creates his paintings—*unit by unit*.

In this workshop, you’ll use three of Close’s materials—a stamp pad, ink, and your own fingers—to create a uniquely personal portrait of yourself.

Prepared by Ned J. Nesti Jr., art instructor, Morrison (IL) High School. Photos by Larry Gregory. Paintings by (top to bottom; left to right) Brenda L. Buikema; Jennie L. Vaughn; Brian J. Dykstra; Nicholas J. Alvorado



Materials

- 24" x 30" smooth 60lb stock
- No. 2 school pencils, vinyl erasers, and ink erasers
- Drawing boards
- Mirrors
- Foam rubber stamp pad
- Roll-on stamp pad ink
- Paper toweling
- Scrap paper

Starting Out

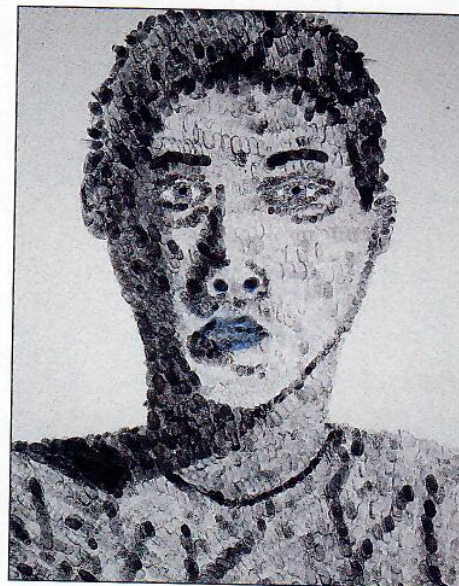
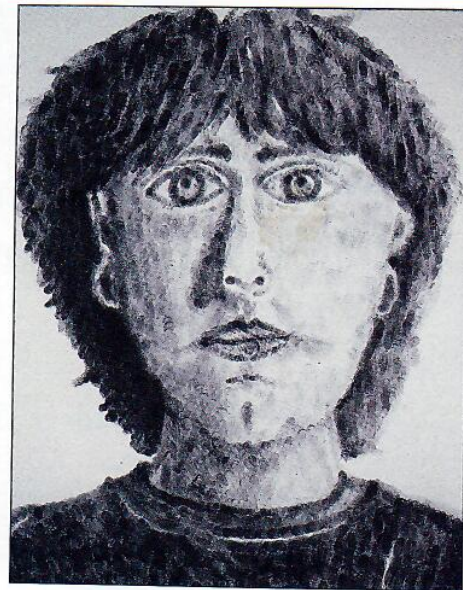
1. After positioning the mirror so you can see your face head-on, begin practicing a few blind contour self-portraits on scrap paper. Divide the paper horizontally and vertically to form a simple grid. This should help with proportion and placement of facial features.

Step 2.

On a large sheet of paper, *very lightly* begin drawing the face and shoulders. Your drawing should be **monumental**. It should fill the entire page like the paintings by Chuck Close. Indicate just the major features—eyes, nose, mouth, eyebrows, hair, neck, shoulders. This pencil drawing should serve only as a guide.

Step 3.

Practice using finger and stamp pad technique on scrap paper. You may use the *center*, *tip*, or *side* of the finger to vary size and **shape** of print. **Movement** and **direction** are set by repeated stamping. Begin stamping out your image using the drawing as a guide. Determine your light source for **shading** and **highlighting**. You can use different fingers or your thumb for variety, but the image is built best by **repeating** marks that appear somewhat **similar**. Vary the **intensity** of the fingerprints; use a **wide tonal range**; **contrast light and dark areas**. You can gradually build dark areas by touching and overlapping fingerprints. Including details during this printing stage is important. Any pencil marks and smudges can be removed with vinyl eraser.



"I really got involved in the fingerprint drawings because with each stroke, I could feel exactly how much ink I was putting on the paper."

—Chuck Close

Some Solutions

For this workshop, you should remember that you are not doing an emotional, expressive portrait. You are merely representing a head in as objective a manner as possible. Will the face be completely **symmetrical** (exactly the same on each side) or slightly **asymmetrical**? Will it be **linear**

or will you emphasize **shapes**? Will you stress **dark and light contrasts**, giving the impression of **volume**, or will you use a uniform gray tone overall to emphasize **flatness**. Will the **texture** of the hair and clothing be rough or smooth, shiny or dull? Are you going to concentrate on the **positive shape** of the head, or will you integrate it with the **negative space** of the background?

Today's artists create portraits by combining painting and photography.

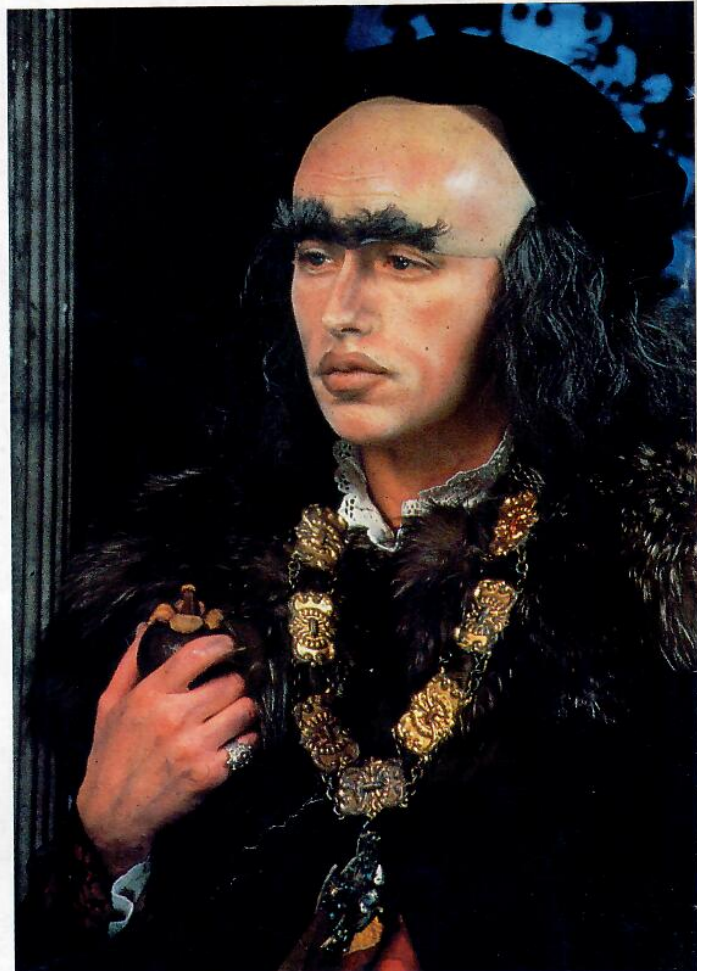
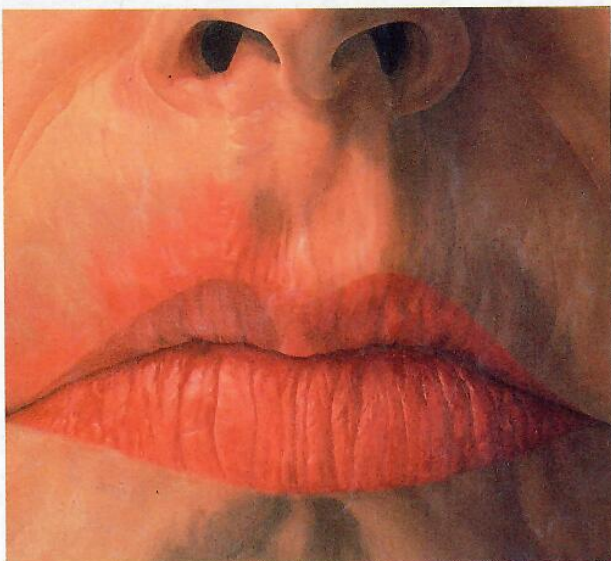
Photorealism with a Brush

Catherine Murphy, the contemporary American painter who did the work below, is known for her highly realistic self-portraits. Like Chuck Close, Murphy works so slowly and carefully it can take over a year for her to finish a painting. And like Close, she includes so much photographic detail that the results are almost overwhelming. She says, "I paint exactly what I see—never more. Most of the time I put in much less than I see. I only include as much as I need

to make things clear." Murphy uses many photographic techniques, such as **extreme sharp focus, dramatic point of view, framing, and highlighting.** This work, *Persimmon*, a close up view of the artist's lips, is so **tightly cropped** it nearly becomes an abstract composition. The mouth is meticulously painted, but the lipstick is carelessly smeared on. Perhaps the artist is implying that we go through certain mindless rituals, but do we actually look at what we're doing? It would have taken the artist only a few minutes to take a close-up photo of herself that would look very much like this painting. But a photograph would have lacked the power, intensity and slightly obsessive feeling of this painted image.

Compare the mouth (below) with some of the mouths by Chuck Close in this issue

Catherine Murphy b. 1946. *Persimmon*, 1991. Oil. 26 3/4" x 29 1/2" Lennon Weinberg Gallery, Inc.



Painting with a Camera

Compare the portrait above with the 16th century portrait on page 10 by Hans Holbein. Do the two works look similar? They should, since contemporary American photographer Cindy Sherman has based many of her most recent series of portraits on paintings by European Renaissance masters. For the past 15 years, Sherman has used herself as a model. With the help of wigs, makeup, costumes, and lighting, the artist has "become" a different female stereotype in each photo. In the past, Sherman has visually commented on women's roles in horror films, soap operas and the fashion industry. Now she has turned her attention to art history, photographing herself as a young girl, a madonna, and a

How can the image above be a self-portrait of photographer Cindy Sherman?

Cindy Sherman b. 1954. *Untitled*, 1989. 49 1/2" x 41" Metro Pictures.

barmaid. And, to further comment on the absence of female artists during this period, she takes on male roles, becoming a clergyman, a king, and a nobleman (above). Compare this figure's hair and expression with that of Thomas More. Why has Sherman given the figure a single very heavy eyebrow, a costume jewelry necklace, and dirty fingernails?