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**MAJOR SURVEY OF CHUCK CLOSE'S SELF-PORTRAITS AT SFMOMA**

This fall the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA) will present *Chuck Close: Self-Portraits 1967–2005*, on view from November 19, 2005, through February 28, 2006. Produced in partnership with the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, the exhibition was organized by Madeleine Grynstejn, Elise S. Haas Senior Curator of Painting and Sculpture at SFMOMA, and Siri Engberg, curator of visual arts at the Walker. The survey focuses exclusively on the artist's self-portraits, consisting of more than eighty works in a broad range of media—painting, drawing, photography, collage, and printmaking—that trace the evolution of his process and self-examination from 1967 to the present. National sponsorship of *Chuck Close: Self-Portraits 1967–2005* is made possible by the global financial services firm UBS.

Through nearly four decades of “isms” and art movements, Close has remained committed to rigorous experimentation within a carefully defined practice, using his own image more than any other as subject matter. In examining this focused body of his work, *Chuck Close: Self-Portraits 1967–2005* highlights how an artist can create a remarkable pictorial language that continues to expand and develop over a lifetime. Celebrated as one of the most influential painters of our time, Close has retained his vitality by continuously reinventing portraiture, a genre often underrecognized in contemporary art.

Notes Grynstejn, “Close is an artist whose vision was forged early on in a full-fledged synthesis of minimalist, conceptual, and process art practices, combined with an unapologetic image-making that has placed him at the center of vanguard art production since the mid-1960s. By zeroing in on Close's own image, this exhibition presents a physiological record of a distinct human being as he changes through the years, from artwork to artwork, providing a universal entry into his oeuvre. As singular as Close's features are, we nonetheless see them on a continuum with our own faces, and part of the power of these works comes from the recognition that our shared visages are given a respectful and even monumental force.”

The exhibition progresses in loosely chronological order and is framed by two major paintings separated by some thirty-three years: the Walker's monumental black-and-white *Big Self-Portrait* (1967–



*Self-Portrait*, 2000–01; oil on canvas;  
108 x 84 in.; Collection the Art  
Supporting Foundation to SFMOMA

68)—the artist’s first—and SFMOMA’s recent *Self-Portrait* (2000–01), a contemporary image painted as a mosaic of dazzling color and the only self-portrait painted on the scale of the 1968 canvas. Throughout the exhibition paintings will be paired with maquettes, and, in some cases, a series of works will be gathered together with the single maquette at its origin. As the viewer moves through the galleries, biographical time unfolds and the artist’s physical maturation is revealed in tandem with his artistic development. The final gallery highlights a suite of recent prints given to SFMOMA by the artist.



*Big Self-Portrait*, 1967–68; acrylic on canvas; 107 1/2 x 83 1/2 x 2 in.; Collection Walker Art Center

Born in Monroe, Washington, in 1940, Close attended the University of Washington in Seattle. From 1962 to 1964, he continued his education at the Yale University School of Art and Architecture, where he studied alongside a talented group of fellow artists including Nancy Graves, Robert Mangold, Brice Marden, and Richard Serra. His paintings at the time were influenced by the work of Arshile Gorky and Willem de Kooning, but he remained dissatisfied with abstraction’s open-endedness. While in school, he traveled regularly to New York, became enthusiastic about Pop art, and began to feel an urgency about pushing his work in a new direction.

By 1967, Close had moved to New York City and abandoned the abstract work of his school years to begin painting from photographs. “I wanted something very specific to do, where there were rights and wrongs,” he has remarked, “and so I decided to just use whatever

happened in the photograph. Whatever shapes were there I would have to use . . . I was constructing a series of self-imposed limitations that would guarantee that I could no longer make what I had been making.” The resulting cross-pollination between painting and photography would prove particularly fruitful and long-standing.

In 1968, Close completed the watershed painting *Big Self-Portrait*, his first self-portrait and the first of a group of eight black-and-white “heads,” as he refers to them, that include portraits of fellow artists Nancy Graves, Richard Serra, Joe Zucker, and the composer Philip Glass. Monumental in scale, at nine by seven feet, *Big Self-Portrait* is made from only a few tablespoons of water-based pigment, applied thinly so as to imitate the slick surface of its photographic source. This series of black-and-white paintings brought Close instant recognition as an artist and set the course for a working method he continues to use today.

Always starting with a photograph as the basis for his imagery, Close first produces a maquette, comprising a photograph overlaid with a grid template. He then systematically transposes the image to another surface—canvas, drawing paper, a printing plate, or a paper pulp collage—square by square. Thus, while the work always derives from photography, it is reinvested with the human touch present in the application method. Though his practice is well-defined, it is far from rigid: For each work he makes, Close consistently “alter[s] the variables.” Whether he fills each square with delicately airbrushed pigment, dots of pastel, inked fingerprints, etched lines, or organic brushstrokes in vibrant color, he continues “to find

things in the rectangle and slowly sneak up on what I want . . . to make it all happen in the rectangle instead of on the palette and in context.” Close has used this method to produce works ranging from large-scale paintings to intimate drawings to elaborate paper-pulp constructions. In addition, he is a master printmaker who has worked with etching, woodcut, linoleum block printing, and screen printing. Examples of all Close’s techniques are included in *Chuck Close: Self-Portraits 1967–2005*.

As cross-references between painting and photography have increased in Close’s work, his paintings have become truly hybrid objects that merge manual and mechanical processes. They also function as explorations of the mutable boundaries between the personal and the social, the unique and the standardized. Close pushes these borders when he creates a self-portrait in the intentional likeness of a passport photo or a criminal mug shot—photographs intended for public rather than private use—which in turn raises questions about the construction of selfhood in a world that constantly impersonalizes.

Close also has been an innovator in the arena of photography, and this exhibition will contain numerous examples of his photographic self-portraits. One of the first artists to experiment with large-format Polaroids, he has created many portraits in the medium, including multipart photo-collages. In recent years, he also has embraced the nineteenth-century daguerreotype technique, which he has used to create a broad range of portraits with an exceptionally contemporary quality.

Beginning in 1988, Close faced new personal and artistic challenges after suffering a collapsed spinal artery that initially left him paralyzed from the neck down. With time and tenacity, his condition improved, and, though dependent on a wheelchair, he was able to begin painting again using a customized brace. The self-portraits made following this event became more gestural and continued Close’s explorations into the use of a bold, unexpected color palette. In these works, Close has revealed himself to be a highly intuitive colorist, whose paintings have been connected to many art historical precedents, including the Byzantine mosaics of Ravenna and the paintings of Gustav Klimt.

Evident throughout Close’s entire oeuvre is a deliberate balancing of the contradictory: the subjective and the systematic; the mechanical and the handmade; the parts and the whole; or the distinct material reality of the painted mark versus the representational coherency of the image.

*Chuck Close: Self-Portraits 1967–2005* will be accompanied by a richly illustrated catalogue of the same title that documents this particular body of Close’s work in detail and across media. The catalogue includes essays by Siri Engberg, Madeleine Grynsztejn, and Douglas R. Nickel, director of the Center for Creative Photography at the University of Arizona, Tucson.

In conjunction with the exhibition’s opening at SFMOMA, the Museum’s Education Department will present an artist talk with Chuck Close on Saturday, November 19, 2005. Ticket information and additional program details will be available at a later date on the Museum’s Web site at [www.sfmoma.org](http://www.sfmoma.org).

### **Tour Schedule**

Walker Art Center: July 24 to October 16, 2005

San Francisco Museum of Modern Art: November 19, 2005 to February 28, 2006

High Museum of Art, Atlanta: March 25 to June 18, 2006

Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York: July 22 to October 22, 2006

National sponsorship of *Chuck Close: Self-Portraits 1967–2005* is made possible by the global financial services firm UBS. UBS, one of the world's leading financial firms, is the largest wealth manager, a top-tier investment banking and securities firm, a key asset manager, and the leader in Swiss retail and commercial banking. Headquartered in Zurich and Basel, UBS employs more than 68,000 people and has offices in fifty countries. It is a Swiss public company listed on the SWX Swiss Stock Exchange, the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE), and the Tokyo Stock Exchange (TSE). In the United States, UBS is one of the biggest private client businesses with a client base of nearly two million private clients and approximately 7,500 financial advisers in more than 350 offices.

Additional support for the exhibition is provided by the Evelyn D. Haas Exhibition Fund, the National Endowment for the Arts, and Margaret and Angus Wurtele.

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**Museum hours:** Open daily (except Wednesdays) 11 a.m. to 5:45 p.m.; open late Thursdays, until 8:45 p.m. Summer hours (Memorial Day to Labor Day): Open at 10 a.m. Closed Wednesdays and the following public holidays: New Year's Day, Fourth of July, Thanksgiving, and Christmas.

**Koret Visitor Education Center:** Open daily (except Wednesdays) 11 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.; open late Thursdays, until 8:30 p.m. Summer hours: Open at 10 a.m.

**Admission prices** (effective July 1, 2005): Adults \$12.50; seniors \$8; students \$7. SFMOMA members and children 12 and under are admitted free. Thursday evenings after 6 p.m. admission is half price. The first Tuesday of each month admission is free.

SFMOMA is easily accessible by Muni, BART, Golden Gate Transit, SamTrans, and Caltrain. Hourly, daily, and monthly parking is available at the SFMOMA Garage at 147 Minna Street. For parking information, call 415.348.0971.

**Visit our Web site at [www.sfmoma.org](http://www.sfmoma.org) or call 415.357.4000 for more information.**

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