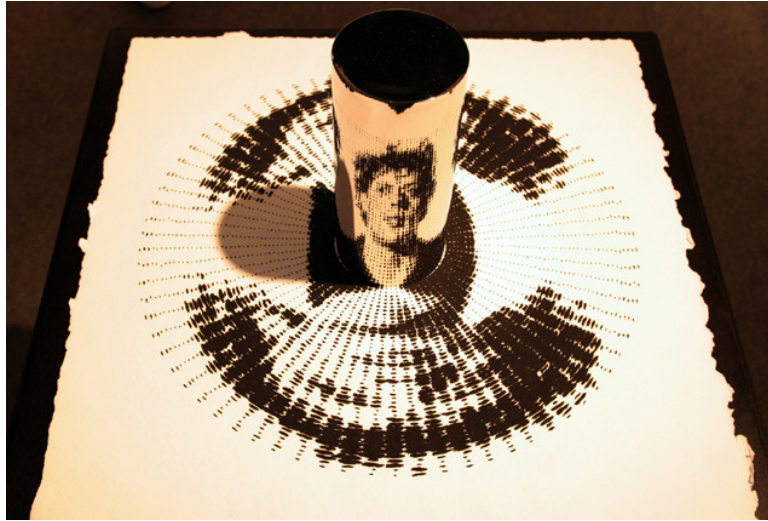


Chuck Close

In the Anderson Collection



Chuck Close
Phil (anamorphic), 2007
Engraving and stainless steel cylinder
12" h x 24" w x 24" d

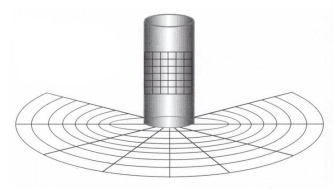
Chuck Close is most famous for his large portraits and self-portraits that look as realistic as photographs. In these early paintings, every hair and every wrinkle is rendered so as to give the viewer an honest sense of the subject at an imposing scale. To achieve these exquisite likenesses, Close drew upon an old tool that has enabled artists to draw and paint realistically for centuries: the grid. His process began with a large format Polaroid, upon which he drew a grid of squares to divide the image. He then drew the same number of squares on his much larger canvas to create a parallel map. The grid acted as a guide so that Close could properly transfer the visual information from one square on the photograph to its corresponding square on the canvas.

The grid became a hallmark of Close's artistic process, as recognizable a sign of his style as his signature. As a person with dyslexia, Close has long taken comfort in the regularity of creating within a grid's system. In his 1982 paper portrait of Philip Glass, for example, Close relegated the wet pulp to the square confines of the gridded drying rack that gave the work its structure. A year later, he turned to the grid to make his *Signature Self-Portrait*, a commission by the Charles of the Ritz cosmetics company. To promote its new Signature line, the company arranged a benefit auction for which it asked dozens of artists to submit a self-portrait in their "signature styles" using a special palette comprised of Ritz make-up. Close represented himself not in the hyperrealistic style that first made him famous, but rather as a gridded figure, with its dividing lines visible across the contours of his face. In this small but revealing work, Close and the grid become one, each informing our understanding of the other.

In more recent years, after a spinal blood clot in 1988 that left his mobility seriously impaired, Close has stopped using the grid to scale up visual information, for he no longer has the dexterity to paint so precisely. Instead, he employs the grid as the backbone for contained experimentation. His portraits from this later period use each square of the grid as a discrete entity, and each one features a distinct abstract form. When the whole canvas is viewed from afar, these abstract cells blend together and read as a recognizable figure, much like a pointillist painting. Again Close has merged the regimented lines of the grid with a complex representation of subjectivity.

In his latest endeavor, Close has pushed the grid to its limit with his first anamorphic portraits. An anamorphic image is constructed on a skewed grid that makes the image illegible unless it is viewed from a specific, oblique angle or reflected in a curved surface, such as the mirrored cylinders that stand in the middle of Close's 2007 works *Self-Portrait (anamorphic)* and *Phil (anamorphic)*.

These portraits, like all of Close's work, began with a photograph superimposed with a grid. As with his recent body of work, Close then translated the sections into a discrete abstract shapes that add up to a realistic likeness when viewed all together. The portraits were distorted into a semi-circular pattern and printed twice on each sheet of handmade paper to create a full circle, leaving the grid intact but rendering the familiar images of the subjects unrecognizable. The mirrored cylindrical surface in the middle of each spray of dots reconstitutes the image in its reflection, effectively undoing the initial distortion.



More so than any of his work to date, Close's anamorphic portraits speak to the subjectivity of the viewer by calling attention to the viewer's own body. What we see depends on our viewing angle, and as we bob up and down around the mirror, the image that looks back at us changes. Glass's face appears more or less elongated depending on our eye level. We can even see multiples of Glass in the cylinder from certain positions around the circle. What we see is not fixed as it would be on a flat surface. Through this dynamic reflection of the print below, the cylinder also heightens each viewer's awareness of his or her unique, embodied perspective. In this way, Close's anamorphic portraits call on us as viewers to see ourselves seeing ourselves, turning our gazes back upon us to underscore the physically defined limits of what we see, and also, who we are.

Heather Green
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