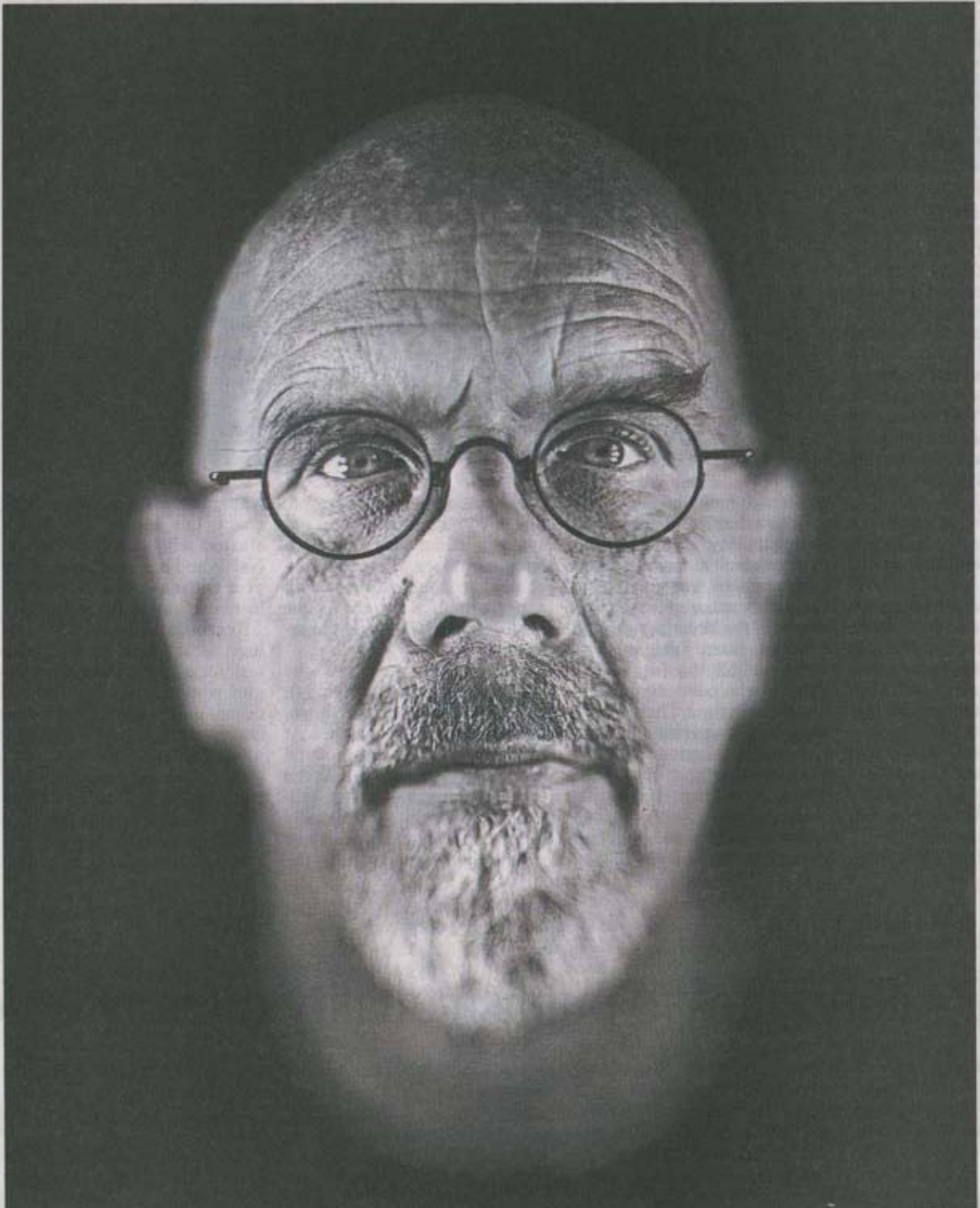


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'Self-Portrait,' 2006; digital pigment print. Courtesy Pace/MacGill, New York.

UNCONVENTIONAL ARTIST

LASM exhibit to feature photographs of Chuck Close

BY ROBIN MILLER
Arts writer

Trendy has probably never been a part of Chuck Close's vocabulary.

Of course, he's not around to dispute or defend this statement; neither is his artwork as Ida Kohlmeyer's work continues to reign in the Louisiana Art & Science Museum's upstairs and downstairs galleries.

She, too, was an unconventional sort, so it's safe to say Close's work should feel at home when it moves into her spot on Jan. 17.

That's when the museum opens the exhibit of his portraits, *A Couple of Ways of Doing Something: Photographs by Chuck Close, Poems by Bob Holman*. Again, the artwork has yet to arrive.

So Elizabeth Weinstein relies on a catalog from a previous showing of this exhibition to tell the story, which works because she has a way of bringing artistic stories to life.

It's her job, after all, as museum curator. And she'll be arranging Close's work in the museum's galleries to tell

the story of the second phase of his life.

That's not an official title, second phase. It's simply fact, for Close's life changed in 1988. He was 48 years old, and his career was at its pinnacle. But then nothing in life is ever certain.

Close was the presenter at an awards ceremony when he fell ill. He immediately checked in at a hospital across the road and was diagnosed with anterior spinal artery syndrome. That's a fancy way of saying Close had suffered from a blood clot, one that damaged his spinal cord and left him paralyzed from the waist down.

"And that's really the amazing story about Chuck Close," Weinstein said. "He had a choice between giving up or struggling to move forward with sheer determination and will power to give to his art."

Close chose the latter, weathering months of physical therapy to regain arm movement.

"And if you look at these photographs," Weinstein said, turning pages

A Couple of Ways of Doing Something: Photographs by Chuck Close, Poems by Bob Holman

WHAT: An exhibit featuring the work of international artist Chuck Close.

WHEN: The exhibit opens Wednesday, Jan. 17, and continues to March 25. Hours are 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Tuesday through Friday, 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Saturday and 1-5 p.m. Sunday.

WHERE: Louisiana Art & Science Museum, 100 S. River Road.

ADMISSION: \$6, adults; \$5, seniors age 65 and older and children ages 2-12; \$4, groups of 15 or more; free, museum members.

INFORMATION: Call (225) 344-5272 or (225) 344-9478 or e-mail lasm@lasm.org.

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'Elizabeth,' 2000; daguerreotype. Courtesy Pace/MacGill, New York.



'Bob Holman,' 2000; daguerreotype. Courtesy Pace/MacGill, New York.



'Kiki,' 2006; Jacquard Tapestry. Courtesy PaceWildenstein, New York.



'Lorna,' 2006; Jacquard Tapestry. Courtesy PaceWildenstein, New York.

ARTIST

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of a book written on Close and his work, "you'll see that the paint brushes have to be fixed to his hands. He had to re-learn his art, and he had to start painting in a new way."

But the pieces in the museum's upcoming show aren't paintings at all.

"No, this is another phase of his work," Weinstein said. "These are photographs, portraits of artists. They started out in daguerreotypes for the other work in this show. So, the title, *A Couple of Ways of Doing Something*, is very appropriate for this show."

Now, portraits are nothing new to Close's work. It is, in fact, his specialty. His love, in fact. He's credited with radically changing the definition of modern portraiture.

"His portraits aren't meant to portray people as beautiful," Weinstein said.

No, they portray people as they really are, which isn't always the most flattering, yet closest to their personalities.

And when other painters on the contemporary scene were deep into abstract expressionism, Close moved away from it, opting instead for photorealism. Which was a highly radical idea when he landed on the contemporary art scene in the 1960s.

So much for trends, right?
"A lot of people didn't think of

figurative art when they thought of artwork at that time," Weinstein said. "But Chuck Close was creating these portraits."

His portraits were massive in scale, depicting people he knew. His wife, friends, artist friends, surfacing each personality in the portrait.

Close often worked from photographic stills to create these paintings, using a grid as an underlying basis for the representation. Close called it "a creative process that could be interrupted repeatedly without damaging the final product."

This quote was taken from the 2003 exhibition *Chuck Close Prints: Process and Collaboration* at the Houston Museum of Art in Houston. Close's works have been exhibited internationally for more than 30 years as Close continues his reign as one of America's foremost artists in any media.

Yes, Close is alive and well and still working in his studio in New York. And his work scheduled to appear at the Louisiana Art & Science Museum is part of his continuing evolution.

For how many photographers in these days of digital technology would actually revert back to photography's earliest days of daguerreotype?

Close's interest in this process developed when regaining use of his arms after the blood clot. First, he returned to painting, but his painting took on a different tone.

No longer could he use his hands to produce precise portraits, so he re-taught himself

to paint by using a dotting technique. Again, the portraits were large in scale, but naturally the look was different.

And they were successful. "It takes an exceptionally talented artist to re-invent himself and be just as successful," Weinstein said. "He re-invented the idea of the portrait in many different ways and still kept the integrity, insight and professionalism in his work."

She thumbs through a second book, this one the official catalog for the upcoming exhibit. It was compiled by Lyle Rexer and features all of the portraits in the show alongside Bob Holman's poems.

Holman has been a noted member of the poetry scene since the 1970s. He's directed plays and now owns the Bowery Poetry Club in New York.

"And Chuck Close isn't afraid to collaborate," Weinstein said. "He's very secure in his work, and he doesn't have a huge ego. So, he collaborated with Holman on this exhibit."

And Holman's poems are designed to portray the personalities in the portraits as much as the portraits themselves. Words aren't typeset conventionally, which was probably very much to Close's liking.

These are the poems that will appear beside the digital pigment portraits in this exhibit. OK, best back up here. The exhibit will feature 15 daguerreotypes, 20 digital pigment portraits, seven tapestries and two photogravures.

All begin with the daguerreo-

types, which, invented in 1839, is among the oldest photographic processes.

"Daguerreotypes give us a 3-D effect," Weinstein said. "They're mysterious, and they give us more tonal range."

She closes the catalog to reveal a photograph of Close on the cover. Close often uses self-portraits in his work.

"Really, what better portrait to experiment with than your own?" Weinstein said.

True, and what better way to start out experimenting with the daguerreotype process than by taking a photo of yourself? Close began working with master daguerreotypist Jerry Spagnoli in 1999 to produce the series of portraits.

Yes, Close could have asked Spagnoli to take the portraits. But remember, Close is an ever-evolving artist. So he set out to learn this process that captures a direct positive image on a metal plate, usually copper coated with silver.

The result is always filled with detail and depth, and because of the way it refracts light, it must be viewed at the proper angle in order for the image to be visible.

"If you look at the old images, the subjects always look stiff and formal," Weinstein said. "That's because the images required long exposure times, and if the subject moved, the image would be blurry."

So Close remedied this by using high-intensity strobe lights. The result is images of great tonal range that capture their subjects

with a rare spontaneity.

Weinstein turns the catalog cover from one side, then the other. Close's self-portrait clearly is a reproduction of his daguerreotype image and does, indeed, produce a three-dimensional effect, as does the portrait of Holman on the back.

Other artists featured in this series are such names as Philip Glass, Cindy Sherman, Elizabeth Murray, Kiki Smith and James Turrell.

"Those are just a few of the names, some that will be easily recognizable," Weinstein said. "They're all friends of Chuck Close's."

And those friends also are featured in bigger digital pigment prints. See, daguerreotypes are one-of-a-kind images, so Close knew reproducing them in photographs wasn't what he wanted. Still, he wanted reproductions, so they were scanned and reproduced digitally, representing a marriage between 19th- and 21st-century technologies.

Also featured are jacquard tapestries woven by way of a digital jacquard loom to recreate these same portraits. And finally there are the photogravures, created through a process invented in 1869. It was the earliest method used to widely distribute photographic imagery and consists of etching a photographic image onto a metal plate, which is then inked and printed.

All of this takes time, and definitely none of it is trendy.

Which makes it all the more worthwhile.

LASM has several events planned in conjunction with exhibit

The exhibit *Ida Kohlmeyer: Painting Among Giants* will continue to show in the Louisiana Art & Science Museum through Jan. 11.

"We'd like visitors to know this, because the Chuck Close exhibit doesn't begin until Jan. 17," museum curator Elizabeth

Weinstein said.

The exhibit *A Couple of Ways of Doing Something: Photographs by Chuck Close, Poems by Bob Holman* will run Jan. 17-March 5 in the museum's upper and lower galleries.

Several events are planned in conjunction with the exhibit:

■ *Fine Art, Fine Wine*, 5-7 p.m. Thursday, Jan. 22. Visitors can unwind at this after-hours event, sipping wine and touring the exhibit with Weinstein. Wine is complimentary with a \$5 admission for members and \$10 for nonmembers.

■ *The Artist's Perspective:*

Photographers' Panel Discussion, 2:15 p.m. Sunday, Feb. 1. John H. Lawrence, director of museum programs at the Historic New Orleans Collection, will moderate this discussion about the use of new photographic media, the choice to continue traditional photographic processes and pho-

tography as an art from today. Panelists will be photographers William Greiner, David Humphreys, A.J. Meek, Victoria Ryan and Jim Zeitz.

■ Free 20-minute guided tours will be offered at 3 p.m. each Saturday.

Robin Miller