

# **A print project by Chuck Close : the Museum of Modern Art, New York, Tatyana Grosman Gallery, July 24- September 28, 1993**

Author

Close, Chuck, 1940-

Date

1993

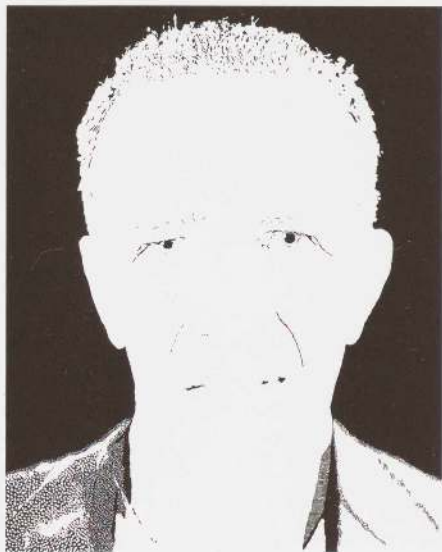
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The Museum of Modern Art

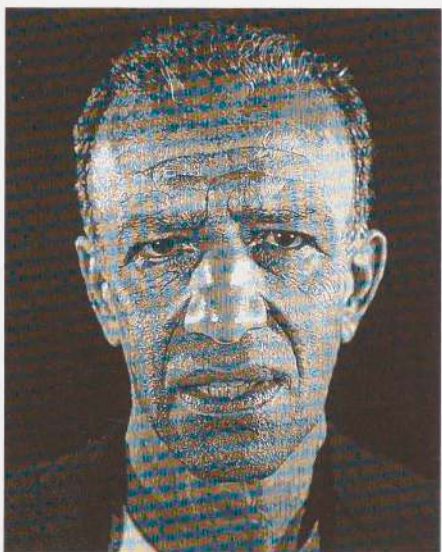
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primary documents, installation views, and an  
index of participating artists.



## A Print Project by Chuck Close



The Museum of Modern Art

New York

Tatyana Grosman Gallery

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## A Print Project by Chuck Close

Covering these walls are the components that led to Chuck Close's largest and most recent print project, *Alex/Reduction Block*. This exhibition presents the work in its various stages of production. Many variables complicated the process, yet Close faced these obstacles head-on and, with the collaborative efforts of his publisher, his printers, and numerous workshop technicians, created a work of immense scale, embodying great intensity.

Close has focused on the magnified portrait head in his painting since 1968, and later in his printed work. He works from his own photographs of friends and family, treating the heads not as conventional portraiture but rather as facial road maps. He uses a map-like grid to organize the space in his works. At close range, each faint four-inch square in *Alex/Reduction Block* displays its own patterns—the dots, dashes, and shapes appear as a series of abstract marks. As the viewer moves away, however, the image comes into focus, melding into a recognizable face. The overlapping patches of gray ink produce a flickering light that subtly evokes depth and movement within the vast area of the subject's furrowed flesh.

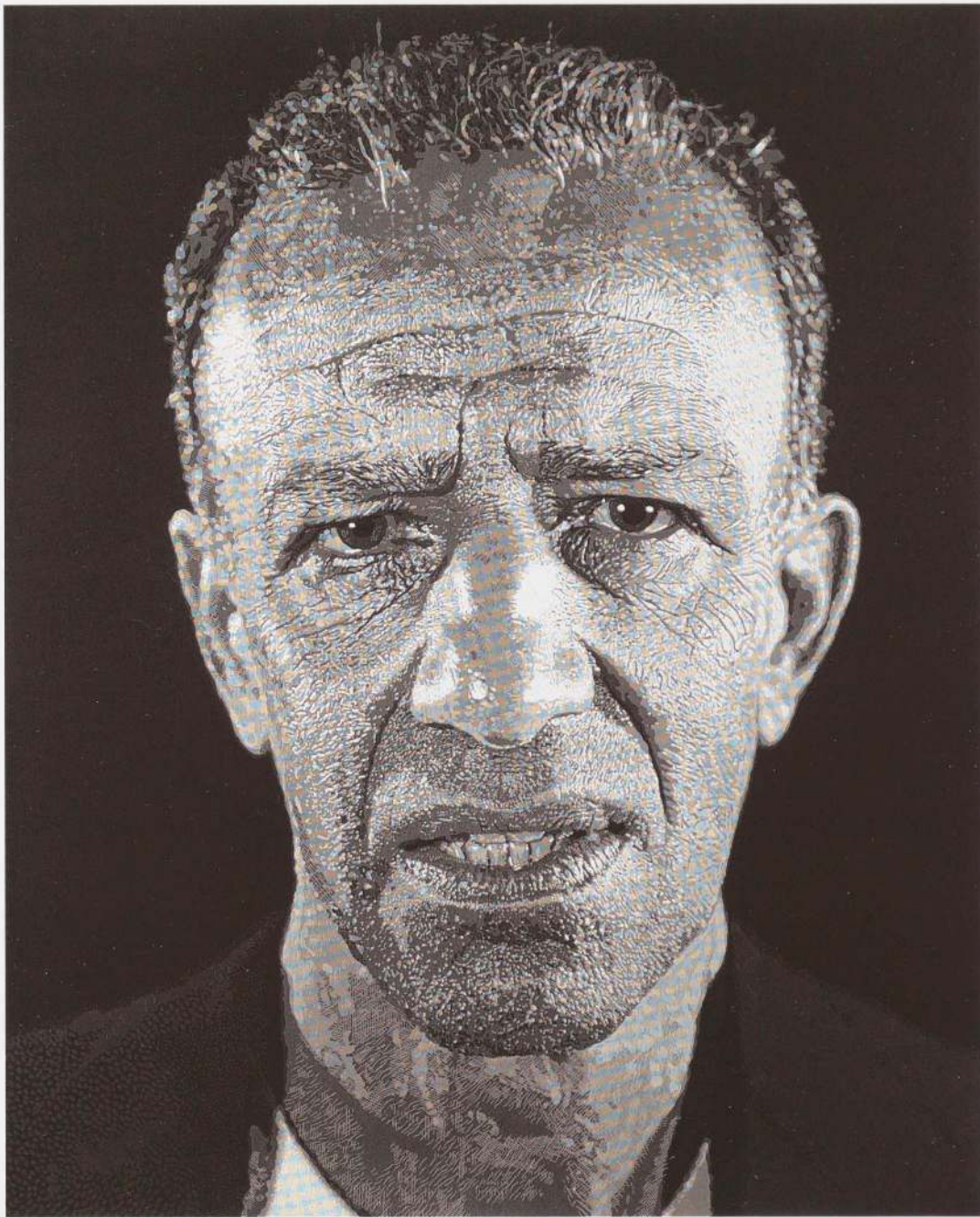
Close made his first print in 1972 at the suggestion of publisher Bob Feldman of Parasol Press. He worked in mezzotint, a rarely used technique in which the artist smoothens areas of a textured plate in order to produce an image. Through this process Close learned to work reductively—systematically taking away from the surface—as opposed to additively, as with his painting. The resulting print, *Keith*, heralded Close's consistently complex and labor-intensive approach to printmaking. The Museum of

Modern Art exhibited this first print project in 1973. Now, twenty years later, *Alex/Reduction Block* demonstrates the artist's journey through newer, more intricate printing processes.

In 1987 Close took Polaroid portraits of his friends and fellow artists Lucas Samaras, Janet Fish, and Alex Katz. He noticed that areas of whites, grays, and blacks were sharply distinct in these photographs. The printer Joe Wilfer, director of the Spring Street Workshop in New York, suggested that linoleum cut would be an excellent medium with which to translate the defined tonalities of these photographs into prints. After studying the reduction block linoleum cuts that Picasso made in the 1950s, Close became intrigued.

To create a reduction linoleum cut, the artist works on only one block, as opposed to cutting separate blocks for each color in the print. With this single-block technique the entire edition of sheets must be printed after each stage of incisions into the block. Once the printing is completed for each state, the artist alters the surface of the block before the printing of the next state. Shown here are the seven state proofs and seven progressive proofs for *Alex/Reduction Block*. The state proofs show what was printed from the block at each stage of its evolution; note that the last state shows very little of the block remaining. The progressive proofs show how the states look as they are printed on top of each other, the first alone, then the first and second together, then the third added, and so on. Close says that he chose to work with this reductive method because it demands a more rigorous and carefully planned preparation and execution than he had experienced





Chuck Close. *Alex/Reduction Block*. New York, Pace Editions, Inc., 1993.  
Screenprint, composition 72 x 58" (182.9 x 147.3 cm). Courtesy Pace Editions, Inc., New York

in any other medium. "It was," he said, "an elegant solution to printmaking, by reducing the various stages to one block."

*Lucas* and *Janet* (both 1988), both modest in scale, were the first two prints Close executed in this technique. He produced *Alex* in the same small format but was unhappy with the result and rejected the project. After not working for a year due to illness, Close found he was still drawn to the technique and the image. In 1991, together with his publisher Richard Solomon of Pace Editions, Inc., New York, and Joe Wilfer, Close decided to increase the scale of the piece. He traveled to Tandem Press in Madison, Wisconsin, scheduling a fifteen-day period in which to use the large press there.

Close's innovative print projects have often led to unforeseen technical problems, and *Alex/Reduction Block* was no exception. First, the large block of white linoleum that was to serve as the printing block was crushed during shipping, two days prior to Close's arrival in Wisconsin. Due to its size, the large linoleum block was hard to replace, however a suitable replacement was found in an oversized vinyl block, which would produce the same results. The next snag was more complicated. Close and his associates worried from the beginning that the rough surface of the handmade Japanese paper that had arrived for the project might not accept ink evenly on its surface. As a precautionary measure, in case they were not satisfied by the finished look of the print, they printed mylar sheets to document each state of the block before altering it for the next state. After printing all the states of the linoleum cut on the handmade paper, Close and his assistants examined

the prints and saw that, as they had feared, the paper had not accepted the ink evenly. In addition, the paper had stretched during printing, making exact printing impossible. Unhappy with these results, the artist returned to the mylar sheets. Using the proof sheets as templates, Robert Blanton at Brand X, a New York screenprint workshop, directly transferred each of the seven mylar sheets to seven light-sensitive screens. These screens were used to complete the work as a screenprint, a method of stencil printing in which the ink is forced through a mesh onto the paper with a squeegee.

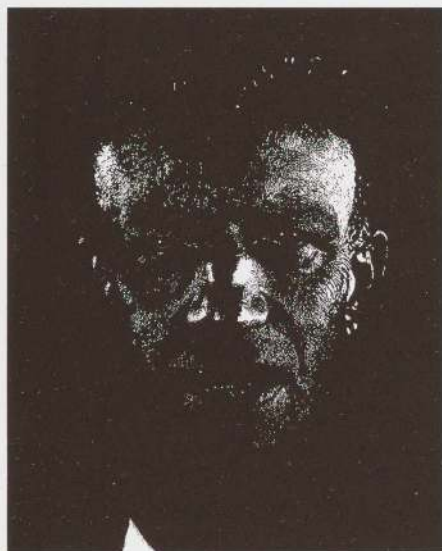
Close compares the process of making *Alex/Reduction Block* to recording a song—performing the piece on separate tracks, then mixing the tracks in a studio to create the final version. Close's live performance took place at Tandem Press; at Brand X all the parts were merged and the print achieved. This screenprint is dramatically superior to the original reduction linoleum cut in its tonal quality and consistency of printing. Nevertheless, Close felt the final print could never have been conceived of as a screenprint. Progressively removing areas of the linoleum block, literally deconstructing the image, was prerequisite to achieving the result he wanted.

Over the two-year period it took to complete this impressive project, Close transformed technical problems into artistic challenges. His ability to find and accept solutions distinguishes his sensitive approach to collaborative printmaking. Persevering with dazzling energy, Close has achieved an image of enormous power and intensity that once again has expanded the horizons of printmaking.

Andrea Feldman

Curatorial Assistant, Department of Prints and Illustrated Books



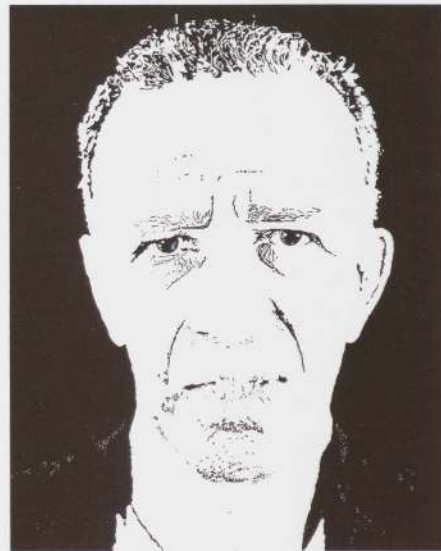
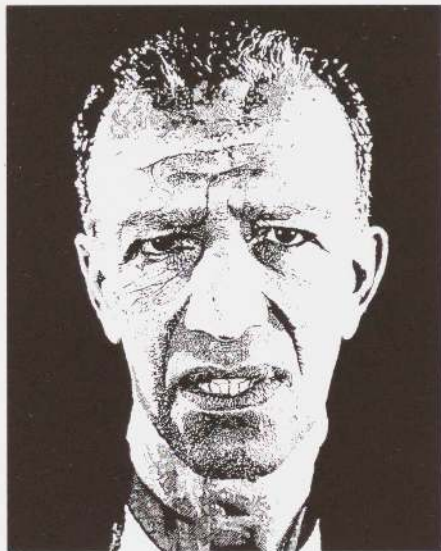
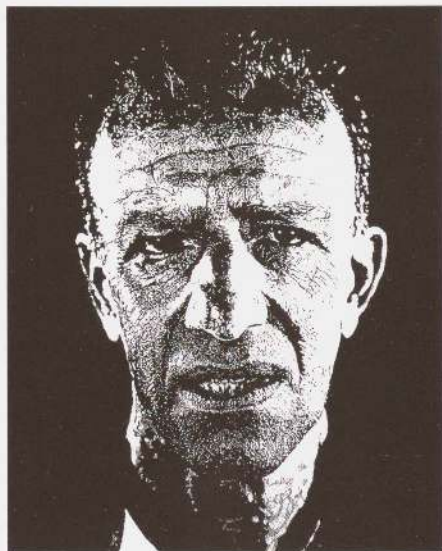


STATE PROOFS, printed in a single color, show the stages from which the final print was composed.

PROGRESSIVE PROOFS show how the states look as they are printed one on top of another in shades of gray; the seventh progressive proof is the final print.







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Photographs by John Back

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