

CHUCK CLOSE

Growing up as an only child, Chuck Close knew he was going to be an artist even from the tender age of four. School was difficult for Close because of a learning disability, but he soon found out about his artistic skills. He attended the University of Washington, graduating with highest honors, and then received his M.F.A. from Yale University in 1964. A Fulbright Scholarship enabled him to study in Vienna for a year. Close moved to New York City in 1967 and started to paint enormous portraits based on small black and white photographs with the use of an airbrush.

During the next twenty years, Close became world-famous for the giant faces he created. Which sold for hundreds of thousands of dollars. By 1988 Close was at the peak of his greatness and considered one of the best portrait painters ever when he was suddenly struck down by a mysterious spinal cord injury. At first he was totally paralyzed from the neck down, but after rehabilitation therapy, Close regained some control in his arms and legs; although, he will never be able to use his hands again.

Knowing he had to find another way to paint, Close had a brush strapped to his hand so he could paint on a canvas while seated in a forklift to raise and lower him. With much practice Close taught his arm muscles to do the work of his hands. Each painting takes as much as four months to a year to complete. Having finished over ten large paintings since his hospitalization, Close is once again recognized as a great contemporary artist. He is able to do everything he did before, in spite of the difficulty of even the simplest tasks.

In the 1960's, Close was influenced by the Pop Art movement. Pop artists celebrated images from television, movies, and print media. In his monumental paintings, Close showed society's dependency on second-hand visual experiences. Using a photo realistic technique that showed a lot of detail, he painted mostly himself as well as family and friends. In his more recent work, Close has departed from these camera-like images and moved toward the use of multi-colored squares and diamonds that contain swirls of contrasting hues. From a distance these brushstrokes resemble a face.

Questions

1. When did Close know he was going to be an artist? _____

2. What subjects does Close paint? _____

3. Close was influenced by what group of artists? _____

4. How did Close paint after he was paralyzed? _____

5. How are his early paintings different from his recent work? _____

6. What methods of painting has Close had to develop since his accident? _____

7. How do you think Close's being paralyzed has changed the public's perception of his work? _____

8. Why do you think that the process of creation is more important to Close than the finished product? _____

8. Do you like Chuck Close's paintings? Why or why not? _____

9. If you had to paint your own Chuck Close painting, who would be your model and why? _____
