

WHITE CUBE

Chuck Close

16 January – 7 March 2020

White Cube Hong Kong

White Cube Hong Kong is pleased to present an exhibition of recent works by Chuck Close. Featuring oil painting, mosaic and tapestry, the works foreground Close's radical exploration of media, and reflect the artist's ability to push technique and the language of colour in ways that challenge and alter the viewer's perception.

In his recent production Close concerns himself with the complex relationship between the 'real' and the digital, responding to the ever-increasing speed of today's image replication and distribution, specifically that of the human face. Reflecting the way that digital technology has demanded a new way of looking, his work draws on new methods of image making, in much the same way that his early paintings from the late-1960s reflected the era's burgeoning mechanical reproduction industry. 'Technology has played such a role in our lives; it's kind of nice when it serves the handmade, where the touch is revealed on the surface of the object', he has commented.

Continuing to use the organising principle of the grid and the relationship of micro to macro, part to whole, Close draws on familiar subject matter: head shots of friends, including 'Fred' and 'Suzanne', as well as his own likeness. Often reusing an image across different media and at different scales, his portraits all originate from a Polaroid, a process he has described as 'sharp focus data within a sandwich of blur'. Employing different mediums, Close negotiates distinct focal variations and surface visual dissolve. In this way, the same face can appear recognisable yet unfamiliar, even though seen repeatedly or depicted in extreme close-up, exposing a perceptual gap between the mechanical eye of photography, the role of reproduction in the digital age and the complex nature of individual human vision. Close recently noted how the viewer's perception of his newest paintings can alter when seen through the lens of a smartphone, since, somewhat ironically, the apparatus of a digital lens is readily able to 'read' and cohere the pixelated painted surface.

In the exhibition, three oil paintings of his close friend Fred depict the same image in progressive states of abstraction, employing a new method whereby oil paint is applied in thin washes, more akin to watercolour. In *Fred/ Diptych* (2017–18), one canvas appears pixelated to the point of near abstraction, while the other coheres into an instantly recognisable image, suggesting the fluid condition of their subject and the way images can alter and change within an endless cycle of reproduction. Close has remarked '[...] this new body of work is more abstract and

quiet than any previous ones, the brush strokes don't make shapes or stand for any particular information per se, they just exist as layers of transparent washes of oil colours that I'm trying to treat as watercolours, as I did decades ago. It feels like a new beginning.'

By contrast, in a large-scale, intricately woven jacquard tapestry, another image of Fred registers with a photographic, almost-hyperreal likeness, while in a ceramic mosaic – inspired by Roman floor mosaics – the same image appears in flux. Composed of hand-glazed, shard-shaped tesserae, the portrait appears to dissolve and resolve at different focal points, shimmering and oscillating with thousands of tiny, incremental parts.

The artist's exploration of the way changes in colour affect the gridded whole are explored in a number of paintings, including *Suzanne III* (2018), where the sitter's face appears like an apparition, almost entirely abstracted and reduced to square blocks of single colours, like a rudimentary digital reproduction. In *Self-Portrait II* (2016), Close pushes this language further, forming the image from blocks of dazzling colour with no immediately discernible visual features. Unlike the three-colour process used by the artist back in the early 1970s, Close now draws on a palette of thousands of colours to build, one atop the other, an image whereby each individual square uses the surrounding squares to determine the resolution of the whole. He has an unparalleled understanding of the impact of minor tonal variations and an ability to predict how transparent layers of colour together in a square will affect those surrounding it.

Resolving at different distances, Close's works demand a physical shift by the viewer, stretching the perceptual field of vision and offering a progressive discovery of part to whole that forms a potent reflection on the role of the image in the digital age and on painting's relationship to it.

The exhibition is presented in collaboration with Pace, Hong Kong, whose exhibition 'Chuck Close' runs until 22 February 2020.

Quotes are from an unpublished conversation with Cindy Sherman, New York, 2018.

BIOGRAPHY

Chuck Close was born in 1940 in Monroe, Washington and lives and works in New York City and Long Island. He has exhibited extensively including solo exhibitions at Ravenna City Art Museum, Ravenna, Italy (2019); Parrish Art Museum, Southampton, New York touring to NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale, Florida, Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, Philadelphia and other venues (2015–17); White Cube, London touring to The State Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg (2007–08); Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid touring to Ludwig Forum für Internationale Kunst, Aachen, Germany (2007); Aperture Foundation, New York touring to Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, Austin Museum of Art, Texas and other venues (2006–13); Walker Art Center, Minneapolis touring to San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, High Museum of Art, Atlanta, Georgia and Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York (2005–06); Blaffer Gallery, University of Houston, Texas touring to The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Miami Art Museum, Museum der Moderne, Salzburg, Austria, White Cube, London, Museum of Contemporary Art Sydney and other venues (2003–16); and The Museum of Modern Art, New York touring to Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, DC, Seattle Art Museum, Washington and The Hayward Gallery, London (1998–99). Selected group exhibitions include The National Gallery, London (2018); Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2017); 50th Venice Biennale (2003); 46th Venice Biennale (1995); 45th Venice Biennale (1993); Carnegie International, Pittsburgh (1995 and 1996); Whitney Biennale, New York (1991); Documenta 6, Kassel, Germany (1977); and Documenta 5, Kassel, Germany (1972).

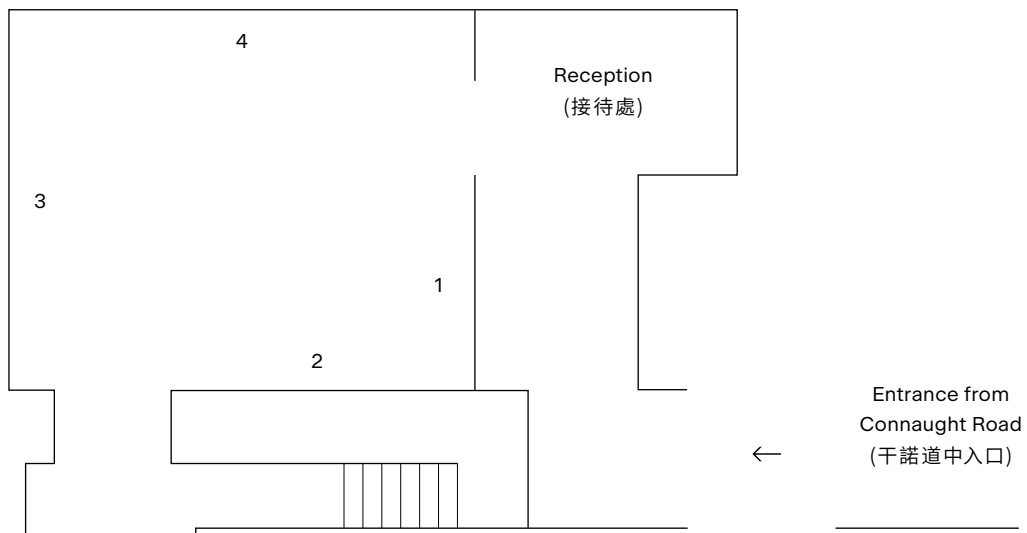
White Cube Hong Kong is open
Tuesday – Saturday, 11am – 7pm.
Admission is free.
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GROUND FLOOR

- 1 *Fred*
2018
Jacquard tapestry
236.2 × 184 cm | 93 × 72⁷/₁₆ in.
- 2 *Fred II*
2017
Oil on canvas
182.9 × 152.4 cm | 72 × 60 in.
- 3 *Fred III*
2017–2018
Oil on canvas
182.9 × 152.4 cm | 72 × 60 in
- 4 *Self-Portrait (Jade Glasses)*
2017
Oil on canvas
182.9 × 152.4 cm. | 72 × 60 in



FIRST FLOOR

- 1 *Fred/Diptych*
2017 – 2018
Oil on canvas
2 parts, each: 91.4 × 76.2 cm | 36 × 30 in
- 2 *Suzanne I*
2018
Oil on canvas
182.9 × 152.4 cm | 72 × 60 in.
- 3 *Suzanne II*
2018
Oil on canvas
91.4 × 76.2 cm | 36 × 30 in.
- 4 *Suzanne III*
2018
Oil on canvas
91.4 × 76.2 cm | 36 × 30 in.
- 5 *Self-Portrait II*
2016
Oil on canvas
91.4 × 76.2 cm | 36 × 30 in.
- 6 *Fred*
2017 – 2018
Hand-glazed ceramic tile
198.1 × 165.1 cm | 78 × 65 in.

