

CHUCK CLOSE

Chuck Close is associated with the style of painting called [Photorealism](#) or Superrealism. In this style, artists in the early 1970s created a link between representational systems of painting and photography. Photorealism developed as a reaction to the detachment of [Minimalism](#) and conceptual art, which did not depict representational images. Photorealists frequently used a grid technique to enlarge a photograph and reduce each square to formal elements of design. Each grid was its own little work of art. Many of the Photorealists used the airbrush technique.

Big Self-Portrait, in black and white, was the first of Close's mural-sized works painted from photographs. This painting took four months to complete. To make this work, Close took several photographs of himself in which his head and neck filled the frame. From these he selected one of the images and made two 11 x 14-inch enlargements. On one of the photographs he drew a grid, then lettered and numbered each square. Using both the gridded and ungridded photographs, he carefully transferred the photographic image square by square onto a large canvas measuring 107 1/2 x 83 1/2 inches. He used acrylic paint and an airbrush to include every detail.

When Close was making his painting he was concerned with the visual elements--shapes, textures, volume, shadows, and highlights--of the photograph itself. He also was interested in how a photograph shows some parts of the image in focus, or sharp, and some out-of-focus, or blurry. In this portrait the tip of the cigarette and the hair on the back of his head were both out-of-focus in the photograph so he painted them that way in *Big Self-Portrait*.

Artists frequently change their style of work and Close experienced a tragedy that subsequently influenced his painting style. In 1988, he had a spinal blood clot, which left him a quadriplegic, unable to move either his legs or his arms. With a paint brush clamped between his teeth, he developed a new way to paint. His portraits, the photos, and canvases were gridded off by assistants and then he used his mouth brush to paint, using the techniques of [grisaille](#) and [pointillism](#) within the grids. This is similar to technique used by the [Impressionists](#) and Pointillists. The result was still a canvas of mini-paintings, which when viewed from a distance are seen as a single or unified image.

Close's new technique is apparent in the second portrait on this page. This painting was made in 1993, 25 years after *Big Self-Portrait* four months for the artist to complete.

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Vocabulary Terms

Photorealism--A style of painting in which an image is created in such exact detail that it looks like a photograph; uses everyday subject matter, and often is larger than life.

representational--Depicts an object in nature in recognizable form.

grisaille--A painting technique using only grey tints.

pointillism--A painting technique in which a white background is covered with tiny dots of pure color that fuse when seen from a distance producing a luminous visual effect.

Minimalism--A style of art in which the least possible amount of form shapes, colors, or lines are used to reduce the concept or idea to its simplest form (geometric shapes, progressions).

Impressionism--A movement in painting in which the emphasis on light and color, loose brush strokes, ordinary subject matter; creates the "impression" of a moment in time. Dabs and strokes of color are used to depict the natural appearances of objects and reflected light.