

Chuck Close: *Cindy, Andres, Kiki, Lorna, and Lyle*

Experimental innovations in portraiture have been Chuck Close's trademark for nearly half a century. In 2005, Close began working in a medium he had never explored: the artist teamed with the Magnolia Tapestry Project to create limited-edition woven textiles. As with previous Close projects, where portraits were generated by filling each interstitial square of a grid with tonal variations on a single mark -- whether a fingerprint, a pointillist dot, or a brushstroke -- here every square inch of the tapestry is comprised of different combinations of the same warp and weft threads and is equally rich in tone and texture.

Close selects images for the tapestries from a series of daguerreotype portraits created in collaboration with Jerry Spagnoli within the last decade. The gilded, silver-coated daguerreotype plates are scanned at high resolution by Adamson Editions in Washington, D.C.; the scans are



Andres, 2006 - Jacquard Tapestry, 103 x 79 in. Edition of 6

then translated by Magnolia Editions co-director Donald Farnsworth into digital "weave files." These files are woven in Belgium with a seven-foot wide, double-head electronic Jacquard on a customized Dornier loom, utilizing 17,800 warp threads of repeating groups of 8 colors. The weft threads are comprised of 10 repeating colors, chosen by Farnsworth specifically for Close daguerreotypes, woven at 75 "shots" per centimeter, for a total of 190 weft threads per inch. Close's tapestries incorporate a fusion of methods separated by over two hundred years: on one hand, the lyricism and nearly infinite detail of a 19th-century photographic technique; on the other, the Magnolia Tapestry Project's innovative, digitally-driven approach to weaving, a result of experiments conducted only within the last decade.

The tapestries represent something akin to an alchemical transformation: the intimacy of the photographs is preserved, even amplified, while the medium itself is wholly metamorphosed, from silver crystals to woven fibers. At the same time, these works extend Close's career-long explora-



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Kiki, 2006 - Jacquard Tapestry, 103 x 79 in. Edition of 6



Lyle, 2006 - Jacquard Tapestry, 103 x 79 in. Edition of 6



Lorna, 2006 - Jacquard Tapestry, 103 x 79 in. Edition of 6

tion of the tension between artifice and realism: i.e., using a highly artificial surface to compose an image which resonates in a familiar way with the reality and life experiences of its audience. Close notes in a 2002 interview that his daguerreotypes provide *a level of intimacy [we're] just not used to... an opportunity to transport someone through to something that I hope has some urgency and resonance with them -- because of where they've been as people and not just where they've been as art viewers.*

Close's latest portraits depict prominent figures in the art world, all of whom are based in New York. Andres Serrano is a photographer; in his own words, his pictures of corpses, religious iconography, Klansmen and the homeless "monumentalize [and] aestheticize the mundane." Kiki Smith is a sculptor who often addresses corporeal sensuality and the human body in media including wax, bronze and paper. Cindy Sherman is a photographer best known for a career-long series of dramatic self-portraits in which she transforms into various characters and archetypes. Artist Lorna Simpson's photographs and videos examine questions of ethics, identity, and socially assigned roles. Lyle Ashton Harris is a photographer and performer who creates emotionally stirring portraits; like Sherman, Harris often appears as a cipher in his own work, posing with costumes and props to depict characters with powerful cultural associations.

About the Magnolia Tapestry Project

The Magnolia Tapestry Project emerged from artist John Nava's commission to decorate the vast interior walls of the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels in Los Angeles. Nava and Farnsworth subsequently collaborated on a series of woven experiments which grew into an unorthodox approach to Jacquard weaving. In the same way that Tamarind and Gemini put the commercial lithographic technology of the 19th century into the hands of fine artists in the fifties and sixties, the Magnolia Tapestry Project is putting the electronic Jacquard loom to work in unexpected ways for contemporary artists.

Artists representative of several generations and numerous art movements have created new woven editions: from the post-Surrealist visions of Bruce Conner to the abstract wizardry of Ed Moses; the Pop princesses of Mel Ramos; the monumental, Expressionistic figures of Leon Golub; the hyper-realism of Alan Magee; and the playful poetics of Squeak Carnwath and William Wiley. The Magnolia Tapestry Project has also produced tapestries by Doug Hall, Guy Diehl, Lia Cook, Lewis deSoto, D.J. Hall, Donald and Era Farnsworth, George Miyasaki, Rupert Garcia, Diane Andrews Hall, Gus Heinze, Robert Kushner, John Nava, Nancy Spero, Katherine Westerhout and others. ■