

# Chuck Close: *Self-Portrait/Five Part*



*Self-Portrait/Five Part*, 2009. Jacquard tapestry. State I: 71 x 185 in., Edition of 6. State II: 79 x 229 in., Edition of 6.

For almost four decades, Chuck Close has created portraits from tonal grids of fingerprints, pointillist dots, brushstrokes, paper pulp and countless other media. It was only natural that the artist's ambitions led him to tapestry, a classical and difficult medium possessing Close's signature tension between abstracted units (woven thread combinations) and a legible, unified surface. A series of daguerrotypes begun in the mid-1990s provided a uniquely suited pool of images for transformation into tapestry: each daguerreotype plate contains an enormous wealth of visual information in the tiny grains of its silver surface. This level of detail and intimacy is amplified by Close's use of the large scale tapestry medium, as every line, freckle, twinkle in the eye, or slight tonal variation in his subjects' faces are faithfully transmitted via thousands of colored threads.

To create his woven editions, Close works with Magnolia Editions' Donald Farnsworth to develop a digital instruction set, called a weave file, translating the daguerreotype image into data which can be read by an electronic Jacquard loom in Belgium. This customized Dornier loom uses 17,800 Italian dyed cotton warp threads woven at 75 shots per cm,

generating colors via different combinations of eight warp thread colors and the ten weft thread colors selected by Close and Farnsworth. A color palette must be developed for each tapestry edition containing all of the necessary values. A weave file is then constructed based on this palette. "There is more raw data in a single weave file," explains Farnsworth, "than if you digitally combined the text of all of Shakespeare's plays."

With *Self-Portrait/Five Part*, Chuck Close sets a new standard for fine art tapestries. In this technically virtuosic work, a near-panoramic series of five daguerreotype portraits have been woven together into a single tapestry. Close and Farnsworth have been working to refine and perfect *Self-Portrait/Five Part* since 2007, weaving nearly a dozen proofs using different color palettes until the desired level of clarity was achieved. By including multiple views, Close again makes his medium and process central to the viewer's experience of the image. As the translation of human topography into warp and weft takes precedence over any one particular expression or view of the artist, the capacity for mere colored threads to capture the extraordinary play of light on the artist's face emerges as the work's focal point. ■