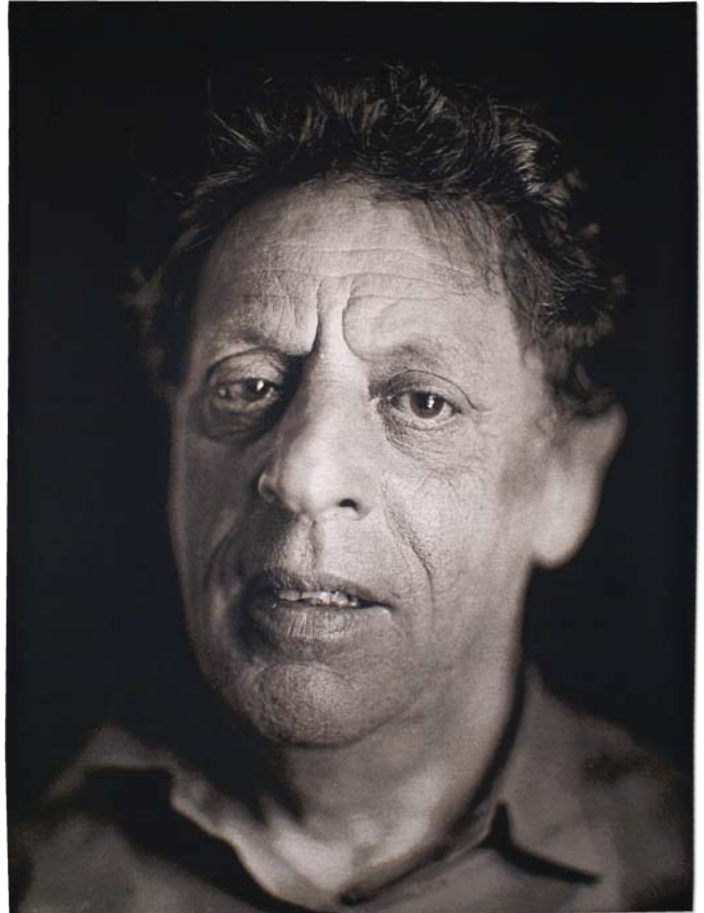


## Chuck Close: *Philip Glass Tapestry*

Experimental innovations in portraiture have been Chuck Close's trademark for nearly half a century. The artist's 2005 tapestry pays homage to his longtime friend, the composer Philip Glass, while revisiting the massive black-and-white portraits which began his career. Where Close's iconic 1969 painting of a young Glass is all flyaway hair, playful smile and jauntily cocked chin, the mood of *Philip Glass Tapestry* is one of palpable maturity and self-possession: its subject appears at once somber and knowing, worldly and serene. The tapestry's daunting size and dramatic palette, translated from a 2001 daguerreotype of the composer, amplify the image's emotional timbre to epic proportions and suggest a level of dedication and respect that could only accompany a truly remarkable friendship.

The harmony of these two personalities is echoed in a parallel set of philosophies and techniques, evident even at a glance: just as Close's portraits are built from slight tonal variations on a single module – whether a fingerprint, a pointillist dot, a brushstroke or warp and weft threads – many of Glass's best-known works feature hypnotic repetitions of spare arpeggios: reiterated, shifting motifs which add up to more than the sum of their parts. Close is often associated with painting and photography, but has conducted rigorous explorations of countless media; likewise, while generally linked to the world of classical and avant-garde composition, Glass has worked in a staggering number of musical idioms, innovating and redefining boundaries in projects ranging from operas to film scores to pop songs. Looking closer, the lasting influence of luminaries from the previous generation – in particular, Jasper Johns and John Cage – reveals itself in the integration of material and process in the work of both artists. Close, writes Glass in a 2002 essay, “was just investigating the process. My real connection to music was also based on process... The activity of making art was the art. The structure wasn't an empty container that you fill up with content. The container was the content... We were trying to collapse the idea of form and content into one perception.”

The spirit of the Magnolia Tapestry Project dovetails seamlessly with the ambitions and approaches of both artists. Glass notes: “As an artist you try to go back and



*Philip Glass Tapestry*, 2005 - Jacquard Tapestry, State I: 160 x 118 in. Edition of 6  
*Philip*, 2006 - Jacquard Tapestry, State II: 103 x 79 in. Edition of 6 (pictured above)

create conditions where you can rediscover how you looked at things in a fresh way. You want to be the beginner... It's where the unexpected can happen.” Approaching woven textiles from a printmaking and fine art background, artist John Nava and Magnolia Editions co-director Donald Farnsworth were forced to play the role of the novice, where one's relative ignorance of a medium's limits paradoxically allows one to transcend those limits. The Magnolia Tapestry Project emerged from a series of woven experiments and color theory applications by Nava and Farnsworth in which the unique properties of the medium – the structure of colored warp and weft threads, the optical blending by which those threads are seen to form an image, the acoustic and ambient characteristics of textiles – were the central focus from the beginning. Too, the Magnolia Tapestry Project's digitally driven, technology-savvy jump-start of the Jacquard weaving apparatus can be likened to Close's high-definition revival of the 19th-century daguerreotype medium, or Glass's innovative incorporation of the toothy rumble of



Detail - Chuck Close, *Philip Glass Tapestry*.

rock and roll into classical forms. As Glass says, “With this kind of direction, you don’t really run out of things to do. That would be like saying the world runs out of ways of being interesting. The material world is always interesting.”

### *About the Magnolia Tapestry Project*

The Magnolia Tapestry Project’s origins lie in John Nava’s commission to decorate the vast interior walls of the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels in Los Angeles, which required a consideration of the acoustical demands of the space: the decorative element was to function practically by reducing unwanted reverberation, prompting an inquiry into the use of textiles. Nava and Farnsworth subsequently collaborated on a series of woven experiments which grew into an unorthodox approach to Jacquard weaving, whereby work by contemporary artists is translated into a digital “weave file” using custom calibrated color palettes developed at Magnolia Editions. The completed weave file is woven in Belgium on a double-headed Jacquard loom using 17,800 available warp threads.

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. The Project includes tapestries representative of several generations

and numerous art movements: the post-Surrealist visions of Bruce Conner; 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 Guy Diehl, and the playful poetics of Squeak Carnwath and William Wiley are all re-envisioned in striking new editions. The Magnolia Tapestry Project has also produced tapestries by Doug Hall, 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, April Gornik, and others. ■



*Philip Glass Tapestry* on the loom.