



CHUCK CLOSE

AND CROWN POINT PRESS

PRINTS AND PROCESSES

Anderson Gallery of Graphic Art
July 7–October 14, 2012

Chuck Close on Keith, 1972

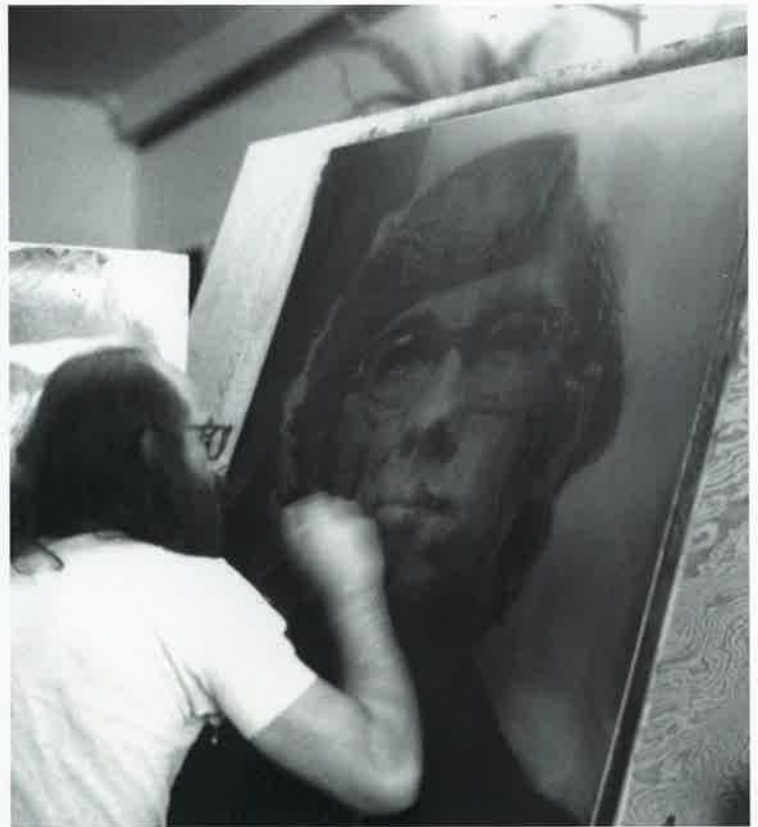
The blacks in this print are really amazing. You have to see a lot of blacks before you know what a velvety mezzotint black looks like. It's not a dead black, where the ink is lying on the surface so that light reflects off it. And mezzotint blacks give the whites a kind of pearly, active glow because the whites have been arrived at through the process of scraping and burnishing, rather than existing automatically as the white of the paper.

—Chuck Close, quoted in *Magical Secrets about Line Etching and Engraving*, by Catherine Brooks, p. 31



Above: Trial proof for *Keith*, 1972, 1998.28.98

Right: Chuck Close working on the plate for *Keith* in the Crown Point studio, 1972



The Mezzotint Process

*When a print is described as a mezzotint, it means that the image has been scraped and burnished out of a printing plate that was first prepared with evenly spaced tooth [texture in the metal that holds ink] so that the plate initially printed entirely black. Traditionally, the tooth is created by working a mezzotint rocker over the entire plate, but traditional mezzotint plates are small, only a few square inches in each direction. At Crown Point Press in 1972, Chuck Close burnished and scraped his mezzotint *Keith* out of a very large plate [nearly 4 by 3 feet] that had been prepared to print completely black using photoetching with a halftone screen instead of the traditional rocker.*

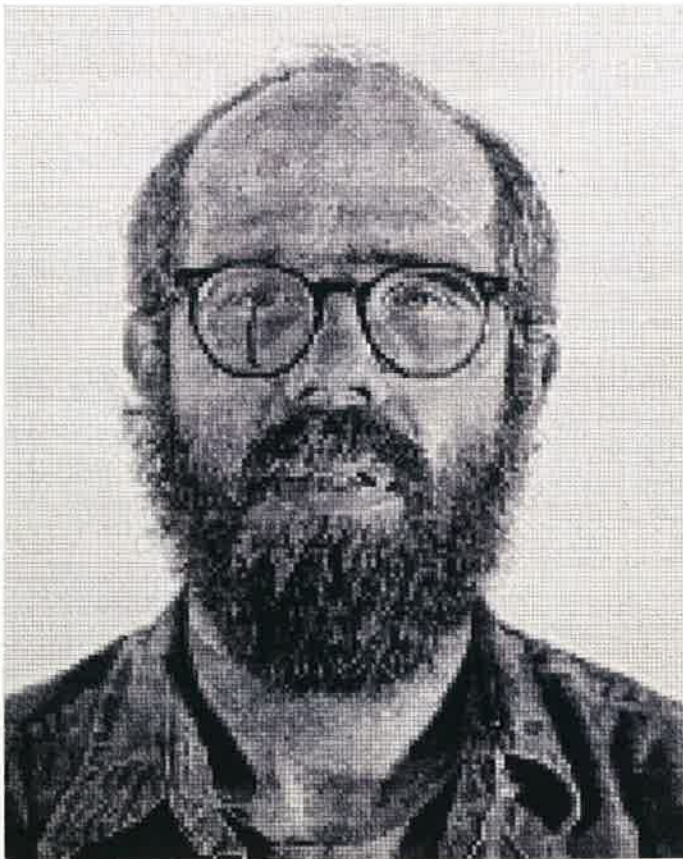
*In making *Keith*, Close used a gridded photograph as his guide, as he does in all his work, and scraped away the light areas of the image. Where you see the deep blacks, the tiny pits from the etched ground were undisturbed. Grays were made by scraping, and usually also smoothing, the pits to create a shallower tooth that held less ink. The highlights are where Close burnished nearly all texture from the area.*

—Catherine Brooks, *Magical Secrets about Line Etching and Engraving*, p. 30

Chuck Close on *Self-Portrait* (*Black on White*), 1977

One of the nice things about etching is that it's very physical. When I made the etching, I was physically scratching and using quite a bit of pressure. It was like pull through, drag through, scratch through. . . . For two and a half months I drew on the plate in my own studio. Then I took it out to Crown Point Press in California, where it was etched and printed very directly. . . . In the new etching, I found myself getting involved with scratching lines. That interest in a more traditionally graphic approach—one of the starkest things you can do with an etching is a scratched line—that again has influenced my thinking about drawings, and I've been doing drawings which reflect the experience I've had.

—Chuck Close, quoted in "Changing Variables: Chuck Close and His Prints," by Michael Shapiro, in *The Print Collector's Newsletter* 9, no. 3 (July–August 1978), p. 69



The Hard-Ground Etching Process

Hard ground is a combination of wax, tar, and rosin. It resists acid. After coating a [printing] plate with a hard ground, you use a pointed tool to break through it to expose lines that will etch when the plate is submerged in a solution of water and acid. Unlike the engraving process . . . using hard ground requires no force; the acid does the work. All you need to do is break cleanly through the ground. Because you are not cutting into the metal, the tool encounters little resistance, and your marks can flow with ease to create sharp, crisp lines and curves.

—Catherine Brooks, *Magical Secrets about Line Etching and Engraving*, p. 104

Top: Photographic still from a video made by Kathan Brown in 1977 when Close was at Crown Point finishing the *Self-Portrait* etching project
Left: *Self-Portrait (Black on White)*, 1977, 1996.74.65



Chuck Close on Leslie, 1986

I am used to making every mark myself. I like to make every decision, carve everything, draw every line. It wasn't until I went to Kyoto in 1986 with Kathan Brown from Crown Point Press to make a Japanese woodblock print that I ever gave over responsibilities for separating the image out to anyone else. I had sent a watercolor gouache over to Japan for the master printer to work on it ahead of time, and I was shocked to see when I got there that it had become his piece. Then I had to wrest it away and make it mine again. . . . I needed to be positive about any correction I wanted to make. I found it strange yet interesting to let someone interpret the work, to make decisions about color and separations. I realized we had to work together to get a good print.

—Chuck Close, quoted in *Chuck Close Prints: Process and Collaboration*, by Terrie Sultan, pp. 111–112

The Japanese Color Woodcut

The classic Japanese form of woodblock printing, sometimes referred to as *ukiyo-e* printmaking, was historically used for making large quantities of popular images. In this type of relief printing, individual wooden blocks are carved by a professional woodcutter, one block for each color used in the design that was supplied by an artist. Fifty-one blocks of linden wood were carved by Shunzo Matsuda for *Leslie*. The carved blocks were printed by a professional printer, Tadashi Toda, who used water-based inks in delicate, translucent colors. For *Leslie*, he used only ten ink colors to print the blocks in careful registration. He achieved the great variety of colors seen in the print by overprinting thinned inks that mixed on the paper to create new colors.

—Adapted from Kathan Brown, "Woodcut Printing in Japan, and the 'Eye' of the Artist" in *Ink, Paper, Metal, Wood*, p. 176



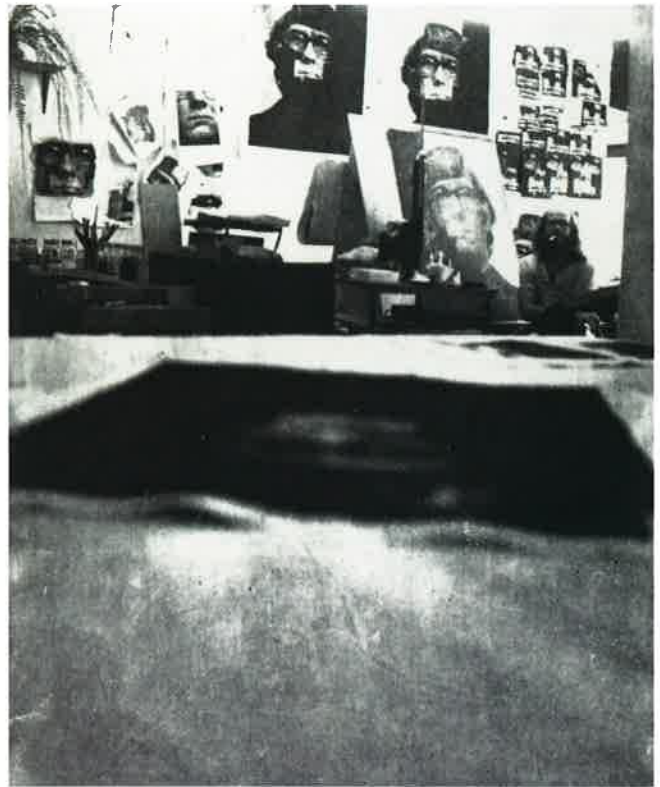
Top: *Leslie*, 1986, 1992.167.998

Right: Chuck Close with Hidekatsu Takada in Kyoto; Tadashi Toda is printing behind them

Chuck Close and Crown Point Press: Prints and Processes



The year 2012 marks several significant milestones for Crown Point Press, Chuck Close, and the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco. The press, widely recognized for its importance as a print workshop specializing in etching, celebrates the 50th anniversary of its 1962 founding by Kathan Brown. It has been 40 years since Chuck Close made his first print as a professional artist, the landmark mezzotint *Keith*, at Crown Point in 1972, breaking new ground for the Photorealist and initiating a long relationship with the press. In addition, the Fine Arts Museums enter their third decade as recipient of editioned prints from the press; since the Museums' 1991 acquisition of the Crown Point Press Archive, this collection has grown to include more than 1,500 published prints. Celebrating these landmarks, this exhibition traces the development of Close's printmaking style at Crown Point Press from a tonal process aligned with his Photorealist tendencies, to the linear mark-making and exposition of the transfer grid that became the hallmark of his painting in the 1970s.



Cover: Working proof for *Keith*, 1972, 2011.1

Above: Chuck Close working on the plate for *Keith* in the Crown Point studio, 1972

Left: Working proof 1 from test plate for *Keith*, 1972, 1991.28.98.2

WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION

Unless otherwise noted, all prints in the exhibition are from the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco. Sheet measurements for prints are in inches, height preceding width.

Trial proof for *Keith*, 1972

Mezzotint

48 7/16 x 42 1/4 in.

Published by Parasol Press, Ltd., New York

Printed by Kathan Brown, Crown Point Press, Oakland

Crown Point Press Archive, Museum purchase, Bequest of Whitney Warren, Jr. in memory of Mrs. Adolph B. Spreckels
1991.28.98

Working proof for *Keith*, 1972

Mezzotint

47 15/16 x 38 3/8 in.

Printed by Kathan Brown, Crown Point Press, Oakland

Crown Point Press Archive, Museum purchase, Bequest of Whitney Warren, Jr. in memory of Mrs. Adolph B. Spreckels
1991.28.98.1

Working proof for *Keith*, 1972

Mezzotint

47 11/16 x 36 5/8 in.

Printed by Kathan Brown, Crown Point Press, Oakland

Foundation purchase, Phyllis C. Wattis Fund for Major Accessions
2011.1

Working proofs 1–6 from test plate for *Keith*, 1972

6 mezzotints printed with various black inks (Charbonnel taille douce, Graphic Chemical, Charbonnel noir a monter, Senefelder's crayon black)

10 1/16–11 1/16 x 10 15/16–12 15/16 in. (various)

Crown Point Press Archive, Museum purchase, Bequest of Whitney Warren, Jr. in memory of Mrs. Adolph B. Spreckels
1991.28.98.2–7

Working proof for *Keith (Keith's Eye)*, 1972

Mezzotint

9 1/2 x 11 3/4 in.

Courtesy of Kathan Brown

Self-Portrait (Black on White), 1977

Hard-ground etching with aquatint

54 1/8 x 40 3/4 in.

Published by the artist

Printed by Patrick Foy, Crown Point Press, Oakland

Anderson Graphic Arts Collection, gift of the Harry W. and Mary Margaret Anderson Charitable Foundation
1996.74.65

Working proofs 1–2 for *Self-Portrait*, 1977

2 etchings with aquatint

47 1/8 x 41 7/8 in. and 50 1/4 x 41 3/4 in.

Crown Point Press Archive, Museum purchase,

Bequest of Whitney Warren, Jr. in memory of Mrs. Adolph B. Spreckels

1991.28.100.1–2

Working proof 1 from test plate 1 for

Self-Portrait (unpublished), 1977

Etching

16 5/16 x 13 7/16 in.

Crown Point Press Archive, gift of Crown Point Press

1991.28.100.3

Working proof 2 from test plate 2 for

Self-Portrait (unpublished), 1977

Etching

13 3/8 x 10 9/16 in.

Crown Point Press Archive, Museum purchase, Bequest of Whitney Warren, Jr. in memory of

Mrs. Adolph B. Spreckels

1991.28.100.4

Self-Portrait / White Ink, 1978

Etching and aquatint

54 7/16 x 40 3/4 in.

Published by the artist

Printed by Patrick Foy, Crown Point Press, Oakland

Anderson Graphic Arts Collection, gift of the Harry W. and Mary Margaret Anderson

Charitable Foundation

1996.74.66

Leslie, 1986

Color woodcut

31 3/4 x 25 5/16 in.

Published by Crown Point Press, Oakland

Printed by Tadashi Toda, Kyoto

Crown Point Press Archive, gift of Crown Point Press

1992.167.998

Working proofs 1–4 for *Leslie*, 1986

4 color woodcuts

30 11/16 x 25 1/4 (each)

Crown Point Press Archive, gift of Crown Point Press

1992.167.994–997

Sources:

Brooks, Catherine. *Magical Secrets about Line Etching and Engraving: The Step-by-Step Art of Incised Lines*. San Francisco: Crown Point Press, 2007.

Brown, Kathan. *Ink, Paper, Metal, Wood: Painters and Sculptors at Crown Point Press*. San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1996.

Shapiro, Michael. "Changing Variables: Chuck Close and His Prints." *The Print Collector's Newsletter* 9, no. 3 (July–August 1978): 69–73.

Sultan, Terrie. *Chuck Close Prints: Process and Collaboration*. Princeton and Houston: Princeton University Press in association with Blaffer Gallery, the Art Museum of the University of Houston, 2003.

de Young

FINE ARTS MUSEUMS OF SAN FRANCISCO