CHUCK CLOSE

Decoding the mysterious process of art

Chuck Close, the American photorealistic painter, is known for his large portraits based on his unique grid work. The creative process he uses to achieve his art is as important to him as the finished product. He is also a master printmaker who has over the course of more than thirty years pushed the boundaries of traditional printmaking in remarkable ways. His work was first exhibited at the New York Museum of Modern Art in 1973. His paintings now hang in the world’s most prestigious museums and he is celebrated as one of the most influential figurative painters of our time.

One thing that makes creativity in my field different from other activities is the desire to not go with the conventional wisdom.

Conventional wisdom is almost always mediocre, because most people agree that a problem should be solved the same way. I think that artists try to put themselves into their own idiosyncratic personal corner where nobody else’s answers will fit.

In our society, problem solving is greatly overappreciated. Problem creation is, in fact, much more interesting. Because, if you ask yourself a really interesting question and no one else’s answers will fit, that will kick open a door that you can go through and follow your own path to wherever it goes. One way to distinguish yourself from the pack is to try and follow your own path with art, so that somebody standing in front of your work will not be thinking about another artist.

Lately, for a lot of younger artists, appropriation is the prime modus operandi, and that’s antithetical to the way I came up. It’s like sampling in popular music. You take something that already exists and you put your personal stamp on it. But it’s going to look like someone else’s art or it will not look like art.

I think the most exciting thing in the visual arts is to see something that actually does not look like art. So what do you do?