CURRICULUM PACKET FALL 2005

Chuck Close Prints: Process and Collaboration
September 6 – December 4, 2005

Unfamiliar Territory: Photographs by Oscar Palacio
September 6 – December 31, 2005

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School & Group Tours available free of charge by reservation: Tuesday – Friday, 8am–4pm

USING THE CURRICULUM PACKET
This packet is designed to help you connect the Addison Gallery’s fall 2005 exhibitions with your classroom curricula and the Massachusetts Department of Education's Curriculum Frameworks. Museum visits and related activities developed for this packet address numerous subject areas that are often cross-disciplinary and therefore can combine two or more frameworks.

The Addison Education Department is glad to assist you in matching exhibition content with the frameworks listed below or others you may wish to use. We can also help you organize your museum visit and pre- or post-visit activities to correspond with your grade level and current classroom topics in English & language arts, sciences, history & social studies, politics, foreign languages, and the visual & performing arts.

How to Arrange a Class Visit
• Decide which exhibition(s) is/are most relevant for your class or group to see based on this packet, viewing the exhibitions, and/or talking with education department staff.
• Select several possible dates and times to bring your class to the gallery. (Tuesdays through Fridays, 8 AM - 4 PM). Visits, ranging from 45 - 90 minutes, may be accompanied by an art making or creative writing activity. Up to 50 students can be accommodated in the museum at one time.
• At least two weeks in advance, contact Rebecca Spolarich at (978) 749-4037 or rspolarich@andover.edu to schedule the visit and discuss ideas for guided tours and related activities that are particularly suited to your group.

How to prepare your class for a visit to the Addison
• Discuss the visit with your class before you come. This packet and a pre-visit to the museum can help you inform students about what they will see and do on their trip.
• Reproductions (photographs, slides, catalogues) are often available for you to look at with your class beforehand. Students love to see images they recognize at the museum!
• Additional information about the artists and exhibitions is always available on request.
• In-class visits (usually including slide presentation and discussion) can sometimes be arranged.
• Mention that students will need to keep in mind: stay with the group, raise hands to ask or answer questions, no touching the artwork or the walls, no running, no food or gum.

What to expect when you are at the museum
• When you come in the front door of the gallery, one of us will greet you and direct students where to hang their coats and gather.
• After a brief introduction in the lobby, we will bring your students through the exhibition(s) of your choice. Students will be asked to discuss, interact with, and raise questions about the artwork that they see. We strongly encourage teachers to engage in the discussion to strengthen the connection between classroom and museum learning.
• If arranged in advance, the visit can conclude with an art making or writing activity.

Making the most of your visit
• Pre- and post-visit activities are the best way to get the most out of your museum visit.
• Project and discussion ideas provided at the end of this packet will help you determine the best approach for the grade and subject of your class. (If this packet does not include information relevant to your class, we can help you make connections.)
• We are pleased to assist you in developing and executing extended projects that connect the classroom and the museum.
**Chuck Close Prints: Process and Collaboration**

**INTRODUCTION TO THE EXHIBITION**
Chuck Close (b. 1940), an inventive and methodical printmaker and painter, challenges the traditional portrait by inviting us to see faces in unusual and fascinating ways. Working with an array of printmaking methods, Close produces playful yet technical portraits of himself and his artist peers by deconstructing close-ups of the human visage into grids of color, paper collage, and even fingerprints. Close’s unique approach to depicting his subjects prompts one to examine the function of portraiture, the individual in contemporary culture, and the digitization and pixelation of our visual world.

**THE ARTIST’S BIOGRAPHY**
From his humble beginnings in Monroe, Washington, to his state-of-the-art studio on Long Island, New York, Chuck Close has defied both life obstacles and tradition in American portraiture. With an inventive father who built him his first easel at the age of four, Close’s creative roots nurtured his natural, extraordinary artistic skills which propelled him past his learning disabilities towards studies at Yale Graduate School of Art and life abroad in Europe on a Fulbright Grant. Upon receiving his Masters in Fine Art in 1964, Close immersed himself in the culture of New York City, studying contemporary art trends like Abstract Expressionism long enough to learn he wanted to do something different: reinvent the traditional portrait. Since the late 1960s, Close has earned national recognition for creating monumental “headshots” based on photographs through the use of a grid transfer method. During his forty-year career, he has successfully manipulated a variety of mediums including painting, drawing, photography, and as highlighted in the Addison’s exhibition – printmaking.

From the moment he was encouraged to pursue printmaking in the late 1960s, Chuck Close pushed the boundaries of almost every method available, creating prints through challenging techniques such as mezzotint, Japanese woodcut, and pulp paper multiples. This exhibition highlights Close’s adventurous and experimental nature by illustrating the ingenuity, focused vision, and collaborative ability necessary to embark on such a wide variety of printmaking endeavors.

When Close suffered a spinal blood clot in 1988, which left him nearly quadriplegic and requiring a wheelchair, he found new ways to create art despite his restricted mobility. Just as he mastered previous challenges in both his life and art, Close continues to produce striking images of people that broaden the ways that we view portraiture, contemporary life, and ourselves.

**ENGAGING STUDENTS**
The objects on view in the exhibition offer behind-the-scene peeks at a variety of printmaking processes while the monumental, up-close images of people – in draft and finished stages alike – inspire discussion about portraiture, perception, and identity. The following pages present these approaches to understanding Chuck Close and his unique portraits, methods, and philosophy:

> Simply Faces: Portraits of People and the Self
> Pixelated World: Perception in the 21st Century
> The Art of Printmaking
**Simply Faces: Portraits of People and the Self**

The evolution of the portrait – one of the most popular art forms throughout the history of western civilization – dates back to as early as the fifth century B.C. when the ancient Greeks and Egyptians sculpted colossal funerary monuments of deceased rulers, idealizing their appearance to immortalize their beauty and power. Renaissance artists during the fifteenth through seventeenth centuries A.D. portrayed the affluent in increasingly more naturalistic ways and used details in the background and foreground to enhance the identity of their subjects. Later, Romantic artists of the early nineteenth century preferred to exaggerate the qualities of inspirational public figures to produce a dramatic effect.

With the invention of photography in the 1830s, the stylistic and philosophical approaches to portraiture changed dramatically. Once the camera replaced the artist's need to render accurate detail, portraits shifted from realistic representations of individuals to psychological impressions of individuals or groups who were not necessarily members of the elite. By the twentieth century, the portrait had taken on a wider definition, allowing for experimentation with new mediums and popular trends. When Chuck Close arrived on the art scene in the 1960s, he did not hesitate to expand it further.

Rather than painting his subjects from life as artists traditionally have, Chuck Close paints his portraits from photographs and later interprets selected images through a variety of print mediums. His subjects are not aristocrats or popular figures; they are his intimate circle of artist and musician friends and family members. In addition, Close's portraits are of gigantic proportion and focus only on faces, leaving out any bodily or background detail. The banality of the frontal format of the portraits reminds one of drivers' licenses or mug shots. The images, including many self-portraits, are typically not flattering, exposing otherwise unseen flaws such as wrinkles, wide pores, and unkempt hair.

Chuck Close's obsession with the self-portrait – the subject he repeats most frequently throughout his career – originated in 1967 when he nonchalantly held a camera out in front of him, stared down at the lens, and snapped the shutter. Resulting were his signature "headshots" – as Close likes to call them – and a lifelong fascination with self-portraiture.

**OBJECT LESSON**

All of Chuck Close's portraits are composed in a similar way: the individual's expressionless face fills nearly the entire frame, excluding other parts of the body and eliminating background details.

- How do Close's "headshots" differ from other types of portraits?
- What does this portrait tell us about Close's artist friend, Lyle Ashton Harris?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is a portrait? What does it look like and contain? What is its purpose? How would you describe Chuck Close's portraits in comparison to your ideas about portraiture?

2. Close's images are sometimes called "mug shots" rather than "portraits." Why do you think this is? What does a Close portrait convey about his subject? How much can we tell about the individual?

3. Close's images are sometimes so large and detailed that they often include unflattering details of a person's face. How important are facial features in determining a person's identity? In today's world, whose images do we see on this large scale – and where?

4. Close's "heads" often make viewers feel uncomfortable. Why might his portraits have this effect? Consider the usual distance people keep from each other: how does this influence the way we see ourselves and our peers?

5. Chuck Close recycles images of people. Why do you think he reuses faces instead of experimenting with new ones? Consider the similar ways in which other artists – musicians, writers, craftspeople, etc. – recycle elements in their work.

> Pixelated World: Perception in the 21st Century

The object... is not just to make a picture but to lay bare what a picture is made of.¹

~ Chuck Close

To create many of his portraits, Chuck Close uses a transparent graph paper laid over a photograph or painting to break down the face into square units. He then fills in these squares with dots, lines, circles, paper pulp, or fingerprints, building the face back into a whole. Though his use of the grid began as a constructional aid, it has evolved into a compositional element in its own right. This visual breakdown of parts echoes the pixelated images digital technology presents us with every day on the screens of computers, televisions, and mobile phones, in magazines and newspapers, and in digital photographs. Close's compositions remind us to consider how we perceive such images as compete units, even though they are made up of small, distinct parts.

Pixelation, or displaying an image as a pattern of tiny squares, is not a new concept: the nineteenth-century French painter, Georges Seurat (1859-1891), demonstrated the eye's ability to blend dots of different colors through his painting style known as pointillism. Instead of mixing colors with his brush, Seurat arranged dots of varying colors in such a way that the eye optically blends them. Another proponent of this phenomenon was the American, Benjamin Day (1838-1916). Named after this printer and illustrator, Benday dots – a series of primary colored dots that create an image complete with shading – were used for the printing of newspaper, magazine, and comic book images for much of the twentieth century. Pop artist, Roy Lichtenstein (1923-1997) exaggerated the effects of Benday dots by enlarging images from pulp comic books, thus revealing this optical device. Chuck Close plays with the same optical phenomenon in many of his works, which can be seen especially in the portrait of his niece, Emma, pictured on the next page.

OBJECT LESSON
Here Chuck Close combines layers of colored squares and circles one by one, balancing color and tone until he achieves a fragmented yet visually perceptible depiction of Emma’s face.

- What does Close’s method of color combination tell you about how your eye operates? Consider how your eyes actually perceive people and objects, paintings and portraits.
- How does Close use light and dark colors to build the image?


DISCUSSION QUESTIONS
1. Why and how does Chuck Close use the grid to create his portraits? (Option: consider the fact that he almost always works from photographs rather than live models.)
2. How does the grid affect your viewing of a Close portrait? Does the grid help you to or hinder you from seeing and interpreting a face?
3. Name as many sources of pixelated images that you can think of. How does Close’s grid method relate to the ways in which we see images in today’s technological world?

> The Art of Printmaking
Unlike paintings, which are unique works of art created directly from the artist's hand and brush, prints are multiples that are created through the transference of ink or paint from one surface to another. The many complex processes Chuck Close has daringly employed to interpret his work through printmaking – mezzotint, lithography, etching, silkscreen, Japanese and European woodcut, to name a few – reveal the patience and experimental nature inherent to the artist’s character. Additionally, such varied techniques have necessitated the artist’s collaboration with countless printmakers and print studios around the world. While many artists allow printmakers to interpret their work for them, Close is intimately involved in the development and implementation of the printmaking strategy used for each work. In this way, the artist constantly challenges himself to find new means of expression and perception.

Making process visible is one of Chuck Close’s main priorities; he regards his works as “experiences for people to look at.” The design, labor, materials, and people which play integral roles in the making of prints can be both seen and “experienced” through a close look at the making of the print, *Lucas/Woodcut* (1993). In collaboration with Karl Hecksher, the master printer of the New York publishing company, Pace Editions, Inc., Close transforms an already intricate composition into a European-style woodcut.
OBJECT LESSON
Chuck Close selects particular printmakers to undertake his projects based on their ability to employ certain techniques. Here, Karl Hecksher uses a jigsaw form to apply the necessary colors to the paper in layers. Oil-based ink is brushed onto each sheet of custom-carved blocks and then pressed to the paper.

- How does the printmaking process differ from that of painting?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS
1. While Chuck Close is also a painter and has made photographs, why do you think he chooses to create so many prints? What do the prints allow or challenge him to do?
2. Should process be visible in a finished work of art? How important is process – duration, materials, collaboration – in relation to the value of the finished product?
3. Considering that the printmaking process can take up to two years and involves many people, where do the art and authorship in printmaking lie?
4. How does collaboration change the role and capabilities of the artist?

For those interested in printmaking processes and materials, a detailed, step-by-step guide to the numerous printmaking methods outlined in the exhibition is also available.
**Unfamiliar Territory: Photographs by Oscar Palacio**

**INTRODUCTION TO THE EXHIBITION**
Oscar Palacio (b.1970) photographs the common places and spaces we each inhabit yet whose beauties and oddities we often overlook. By zooming in on conspicuous lawn ornaments, concrete stairwells leading nowhere, and ubiquitous white picket fences, Palacio invites us to question our relationship with both the constructed and the natural in domestic and urban environments. As a native of Colombia, Palacio explores the United States with a discerning eye; he considers himself a stranger in “unfamiliar territory” – a territory so familiar to those who reside there that they may miss the intriguing details. His images will compel students to examine their own surroundings from a similarly discerning perspective.

**ENGAGING STUDENTS**
Careful viewing of Palacio’s photographs can lead to interesting discussions relating to the natural sciences, social studies, and art and architecture, and has the potential to inspire intriguing poems and stories. At advanced levels, conversations can also be directed towards conservation, urbanization, and the individual’s role in suburban development. The following approaches to understanding the exhibition, Mysterious Places and Suburban Encounters, will stimulate critical thinking in all subjects.

> Mysterious Places
Though one can easily identify the objects that Palacio isolates in his photographs – a white picket fence, a concrete sidewalk, a plastic tarp – they suddenly become new and mysterious in their solitude. Made mundane through everyday exposure and routine, Astroturf and cement are now intriguing, beautiful, and sometimes humorous through Palacio’s lens. The artist also delicately comments on the ambiguous function of fences, investigating their disparate roles as divider, protector, container, and decorator.

While Palacio’s close-up angles make it difficult to determine the location of the subject in focus, one immediately recognizes aspects of these familiar scenes as one’s own front lawn, the neighbor’s driveway, or the parking lot down the street. Images like Fence and Truck (2004, see cover image) remind the viewer that one only needs to travel as far as the backyard to discover something interesting, enigmatic, or mysterious.

**OBJECT LESSON**
By photographing very close to the bars of a haunting black gate but intentionally blurring the buildings in the background, Palacio composes Blackbars in such a way as to provoke imaginative responses to the image.

- What are we looking at?
- What is beyond the bars?
- Are we looking in or out?
- What narrative does this picture evoke?

*Black Bars, 2005, c-print, Courtesy of Howard Yezerski Gallery, Boston, and Julie Saul Gallery, New York*
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does Oscar Palacio create mystery in his photographs? Consider: theme, setting, composition, light, space, cropping, focus, etc.
2. What details does Palacio focus on to provide clues to understanding the scene and the story behind it? What does he leave out?
3. Why do you think that Palacio does not include people in his photographs? How might the inclusion of people change your reading of the images?

Suburban Encounters
The most prevalent theme running through Oscar Palacio’s photographs is that of the ambiguous and often contradictory relationship between humans and nature. The artist investigates the intersection of these two forces, revealing the silent battle between concrete and grass, fence and tree, the organic and the manicured. Where the effects of suburban development have masked fields in poured asphalt, tiny weeds and wildflowers find a way to survive between cracks and fissures. Although grass is torn up to make room for stretches of concrete, Astroturf is used as a covering for picnic tables. The irony of this tendency to at once destroy and re-create nature is not lost on Palacio, whose images are subtly humorous reminders of our inconsistent and sometimes confused relationship with our environment.

An advanced look at the photographs in Unfamiliar Territory: Photographs by Oscar Palacio and the small, companion exhibition, Reality Bites (curated by the artist), can evoke stimulating debates about where our attitude toward and treatment of nature is leading us on both a practical and psychological level.

OBJECT LESSON
The foreground presents a tree stump whose recently cut trunk and limbs are piled beside a porch in the background.

- What is the relationship between the wood of the freshly cut tree and the wood from which the porch and house are made?
- How does Palacio manipulate light, space, and focus to direct our attention to these otherwise subtle relationships?

Stump, 2005, c-print, Courtesy of Howard Yezerski Gallery, Boston, and Julie Saul Gallery, New York

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does Oscar Palacio help us to see the relationship between humans and nature in his photographs? What is his point of view?
2. Fences appear in many different shapes, sizes, and circumstances in Palacio’s photographs. What purpose do fences serve? (Advanced option: discuss the conspicuous history of fences in United States culture.)
3. In Palacio’s photographs, are humans or nature winning the struggle for space and prominence? How about in the environment in which you live?
Connecting the Exhibitions

The works of Chuck Close and Oscar Palacio, when viewed together, ignite a rich dialogue concerning the perception of oneself, one's peers, and one's environment. Just as printmaker/painter Close zooms in on the often imperceptible details and imperfections of his friends' faces, photographer Palacio focuses on the overlooked features and blemishes of urban and suburban worlds. Close and Palacio both play with color, light, texture, and pattern, manipulating formal elements to achieve their desired effects. Though they employ photography in very different ways, both artists push viewers to confront everyday life more intimately and honestly.

1. What is the relationship of each artist to his subject? What is each trying to express and convey to his viewers?
2. How do Close and Palacio direct the viewer to look at the details of everyday worlds with a more attentive, critical eye than usual?
3. How do Close and Palacio use composition, color, shape, line, pattern, and other formal elements in similar or different ways?
4. What other artists might you compare to Close and/or Palacio in terms of subject, medium, or ideas?

Art & Writing Activities (for the museum or classroom)

Chuck Close Prints: Process and Collaboration
1. Make your own print! You will need: Styrofoam plates, sharp pencils, paint or ink, paper. Carve a picture onto the bottom of a plate using a pencil. Paint the surface and immediately press onto the paper. Remove carefully to avoid smudging. Repeat as desired with different colors, paints, or paper.
2. Fun with Grids: As a group or individually, divide a photograph (a self- or group portrait, landscape, etc.) into a grid of 1" squares, reproduce and enlarge the picture squares with a medium of your choice, and reunite them like a puzzle to create the original image. As a fun experiment, multiple self-portraits can be mixed and combined to make a new face.
3. Fingerprint Portraits: Based on a photograph of yourself, a friend, or family member, use your ink-dipped fingertips to create a fingerprint portrait.
4. Painting Transparencies: Just as Chuck Close's prints are made up of layers of ink, you can compose an image of layered colors by applying ink or paint to multiple sheets of transparent plastic (mylar) or tracing paper. Combine the layers and watch your picture come to life!
5. Chuck Close makes many portraits of his friends. Who would you chose to make a portrait of and why? Respond in writing and/or create a portrait.
6. Chuck Close uses dots, squares, lines, fingerprints, colors, etc. to express the image and personality of his subjects. Develop a written portrait of the person in one of his works focusing on how these artistic elements contribute to the expression and meaning of the image.
7. Create your own self-portrait in writing and image. Keep the following questions in mind as you work: How do you see yourself? What physical features are most important to you and why? How do you want others to see and understand you? What can you convey in writing that you cannot in an image?

Unfamiliar Territory: Photographs by Oscar Palacio
1. Use the inspiration from a photograph by Osamar Palacio to write a story or poem. Where do those stairs lead? What lies behind the doorway? Why was the tree chopped down? Use your imaginative answers to these questions and others in your creative writing.
2. Write a dialogue between a natural and a human-made element in one of the photographs. If the flower and truck, bush and fence, or weed and concrete could speak to each other, what would they say?

3. Scavenger Hunt: Map out a visual scavenger hunt by selecting objects or places from your familiar surroundings and photographing them up-close or at unexpected angles. Share these images with classmates, friends, or family who must determine the locations of your photographs. After the hunt, consider why you chose to focus on certain details and what you learned about your environment that you did not know before.

4. Urban/Suburban Encounters: How does nature interact with your home or school environment? Find the meeting places of the natural and human-made in your immediate surroundings. Photograph these objects and places and arrange your images as a collage, book, or poster. (Option: Describe in writing how the natural and human-made elements in your photographs interact and include this in your presentation. Consider who made the constructed objects and why. Are the elements cooperating - or conflicting - with one another?)

Resources for Chuck Close Prints: Process and Collaboration

**BOOKS**


**INTERNET**

[http://www.chuckclose.coe.uh.edu/](http://www.chuckclose.coe.uh.edu/)

Official exhibition website presenting a range of information including the artist’s biography, a guide to understanding the printmaking processes used by the artist, learning resources with additional classroom activity ideas, and more.
The Museum of Modern Art’s interactive website which brilliantly illustrates the steps involved in popular printmaking techniques including etching, screenprint, woodcut, and lithography. A glossary of printmaking terms, examples of prints from the collection, historical information, and a list of additional resources are also provided.

Offers suggestions for teaching students how to learn about geometry through art. Lesson plans, art activities, and printable hand-outs including grids are available.

FILM

*Chuck Close: A Portrait in Progress.* (Directed by Marion Cajori. MUSE Film and Television, 1997. DVD, 2003, 57 minutes). Biographical film tracing Close’s development from childhood art-maker to contemporary portrait artist and exploring his involvement in the present-day New York City art community. Includes the evolution of a large-scale painting from photograph to completion.

Resources for *Unfamiliar Territory: Photographs by Oscar Palacio*


Web page for the exhibition, *Drop Out*, at the Julie Saul Gallery featuring Palacio alongside other artists who explore the interrelationship between the natural and constructed environment.

A fully-illustrated brochure for the Addison exhibition is available at the museum or by request.

Other photographers whose works are useful for the study of the enigmatic relationship between humans and their constructed environments include: William Eggleston, Joel Sternfeld, Lee Friedlander, and Robert Adams.