



Chuck Close, shown in his studio working on a self-portrait, is the subject of a documentary.

Master Portraitist, Writ Large Himself

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“Chuck Close,” about the painter, photographer and printmaker by the documentary filmmaker Marion Cajori, is an expansion of Ms. Cajori’s acclaimed 1998 short “Chuck Close: A Portrait in Progress.” But where it truly excels is in its depiction of the physical process of making art.

This film lets Mr. Close frame the highlights of his life and career, including his upbringing in strait-laced 1950s Monroe, Wash.; the pivotal role he played in the 1960s and ’70s downtown art scene; the spinal-column blood clot that landed him in a wheelchair in 1988 and made it difficult to paint without mechanical aids and help from assistants; and his struggle to create innovative, significant representational paintings in an era when photography seems to have rendered such art irrelevant.

More mesmerizing, however, is the attention that Ms. Cajori, who died in August of 2006, devotes to Mr. Close’s process, which entails blowing up

photographs by way of a grid system and re-rendering each section as a huge, abstracted square. The technique somehow combines uncanny intimacy and intellectual distance, much like Ms. Cajori's splendid movie, which captures Mr. Close at work via a combination of probing close-ups of paint-daubed canvas and wide shots that situate him within his work space.

CHUCK CLOSE

Opens in Manhattan on Wednesday.

Produced, directed and edited by Marion Cajori; directors of photography, Mead Hunt, Ken Kobland and David Leitner; song "Portrait of Chuck" by Philip Glass, performed by Bruce Levingston; released by Art Kaleidoscope Foundation. At the Film Forum, 209 West Houston Street, west of Avenue of the Americas, South Village. Running time: 1 hour 56 minutes. This film is not rated.