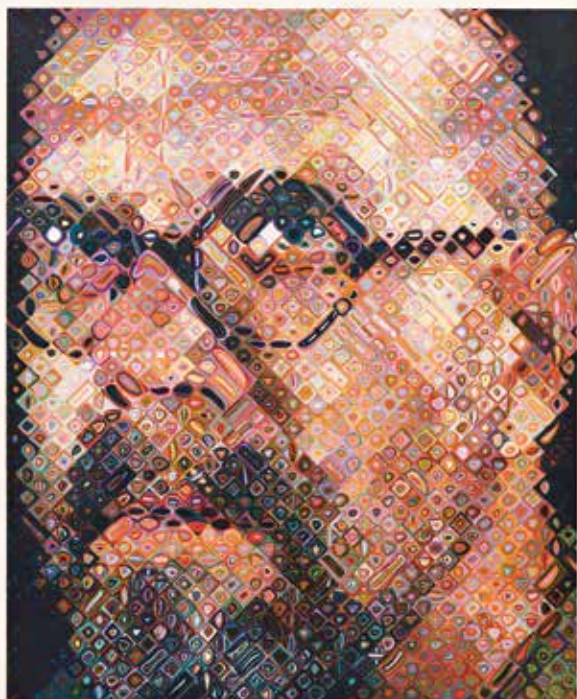


FAVORITE



Self-Portrait
CHUCK CLOSE (b. 1940)
 2000, screenprint, 65 1/2 x 54 1/4 in.
 Collection of Daniel Boulud
 Photo courtesy of Pace Gallery



DANIEL BOULUD
Chef and restaurateur

Daniel Boulud, America's best-known chef and restaurateur, has a taste for truffles that matches his appetite for good art. One of his artist friends, Chuck Close, enjoys truffles as much as he does.

"Although I invite Chuck to the restaurant all the time, I always make sure to do so when the black and white truffles are in season together for a short time, beginning in early January," says Boulud from his office overlooking the kitchen of his flagship restaurant on Park Avenue — a windowed perch he refers to as the "kitchen cockpit." "I've learned that artists usually have good palates," a remark that might confuse some people into thinking that Boulud also means *palette*. "They have good taste in wine and in food, but they're not always good socializers. So for them to have a close relationship with a chef is like having a relationship with a craftsman."

Apart from the valuable truffles he cooks with, Boulud covets another highly valuable object in his apartment: a large screenprint of one of Close's most recognizable self-portraits. Completed in 2000, this work is composed of Close's trademark pixels, small painted circles and rounded squares that from a sufficient distance magically merge into a discernible face, not unlike a computer-generated photo, which when viewed too closely dissolves into a blur of dots. Within each of Close's pixels, he paints different rings of colors, no two alike.

"I never tire of looking at it," comments Boulud, who says that the work was a personal gift from a friend. "I look at it every day in my living room. I can look at it sideways and feel connected to it. I can look at it straight on, close up, far away, and I feel connected to it. My dream is a more loft-like apartment where I could have a greater distance from which to look at it."

Even Boulud's 2 1/2-year-old son, Julien, likes the work. "Ever since he started to walk, he's been fascinated by it," says Boulud. "If you say to him, 'Where's Chuck?' he points to the portrait. He loves Chuck."

Boulud's face is as recognizable to the public as Close's. The chef's likeness is now rendered in Vik Muniz's mosaic tiles in Manhattan's new 72nd Street subway station, while Close's mosaic self-portrait can be seen in the 86th Street station. In addition to their truffle bond, Close and Boulud collaborate on the City Meals on Wheels program, of which Boulud is co-president. "Chuck has been a great supporter of the charity and has sent me a smaller work that he has stipulated be sold at the next City Meals gala. It's important when an artist of Chuck's caliber participates in such a meaningful way."

In 1988, Chuck Close was afflicted with a spinal cord injury that left him a paraplegic and confined to a wheelchair. Boulud, who met Close long afterward, remains in awe of the artist's perseverance. "His transformation was almost as if you have been cooking in a certain style your whole life, and suddenly you have to change your style and entire way of thinking, the way you present and taste everything," says Boulud. "Chuck has been able to do that and remain a relevant, strong, and powerful artist. Artists always go up and down in their moods, but when Chuck was affected physically, he struck back. I think that's very powerful."