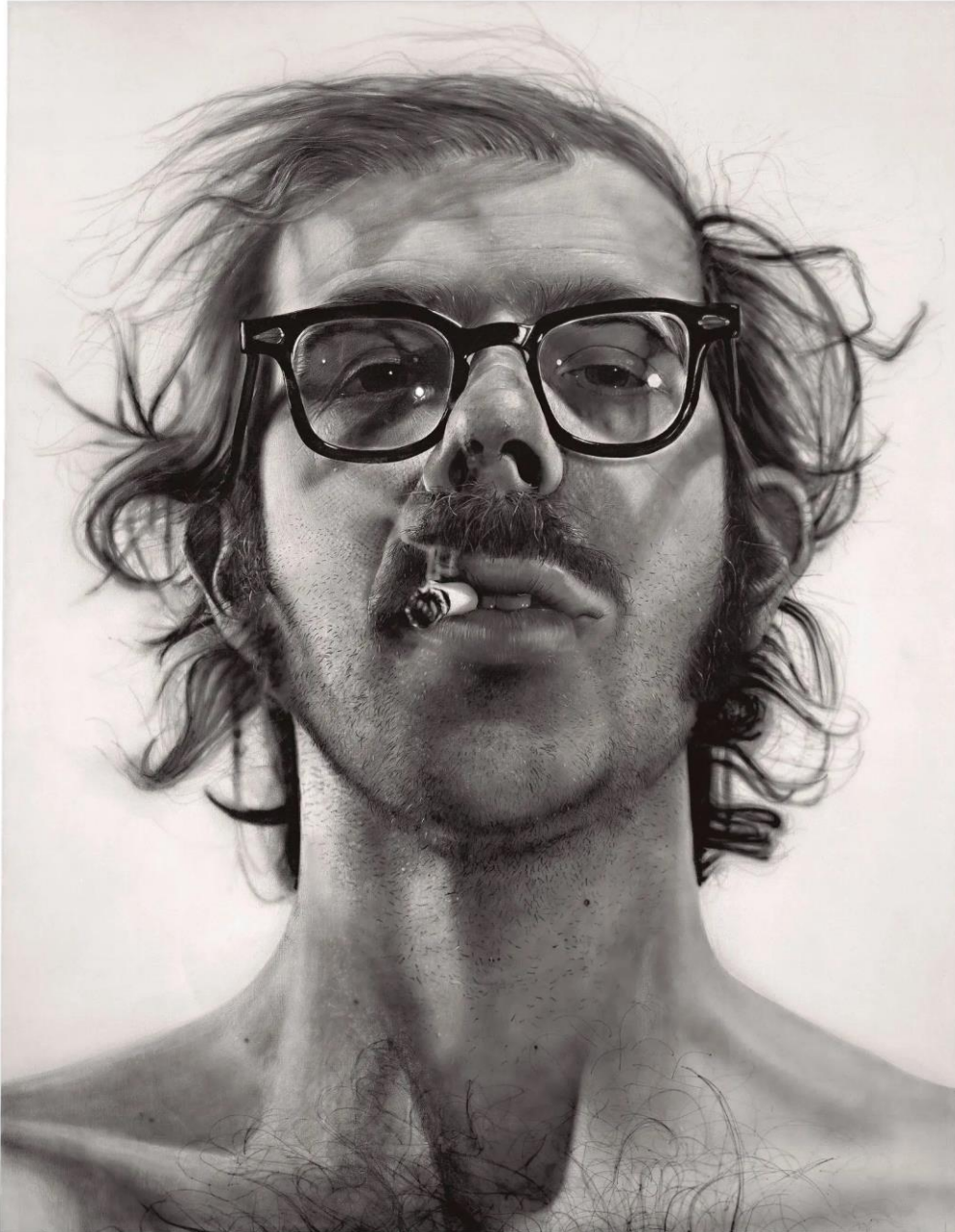


# PRESIDENT'S REPORT JUNE 2025

## PHOTOGRAPHY AND PAINTING (Part 2)



Chuck Close, Big Self Portrait, 1966

In the last President's Report we looked at some of the ways in which artists have made use of photography in their work. As often as not, a photograph is a substitute for drawing. The exploration, the analysis, the planning, the composing, the decision-making that goes into a study or preliminary drawing is assigned to the photographs. The painting is half finished before the paint is squeezed onto the palette.

Or, the photograph helps to cut through the false starts, the mistakes, the tedium of preliminary mapping, the boring bits, and the inept drawing. We can get on with what it's really all about: the

materiality of the paint and the lavish possibilities of colour. The photograph provides the foundation on which the painted edifice is built.

Here is a further look at how some painters go about this still controversial procedure.

### ERIC FISCHL



Fischl, At St Barts-Ralphs, 2009



Fischl, The Appearance



Fischl, Clearing the Table



Fischl, With April Goring



Fischl is an American artist who concerns himself with the unlikely subject of suburban life in America, with its swimming pools, sail boats, sun tans, and sex. The work is intended to be cynical and ironic but is nonetheless beautifully painted. He is often compared to both Degas and Edward Hopper. Hopper abjured photography, working from observation and memory. Degas, on the other hand, was a passionate photographer who made use of his own photographs in his paintings. Much of his work depicted the nineteenth-century French version of Fischl's wealthy middle class. They both had a penchant for photographing the nude.



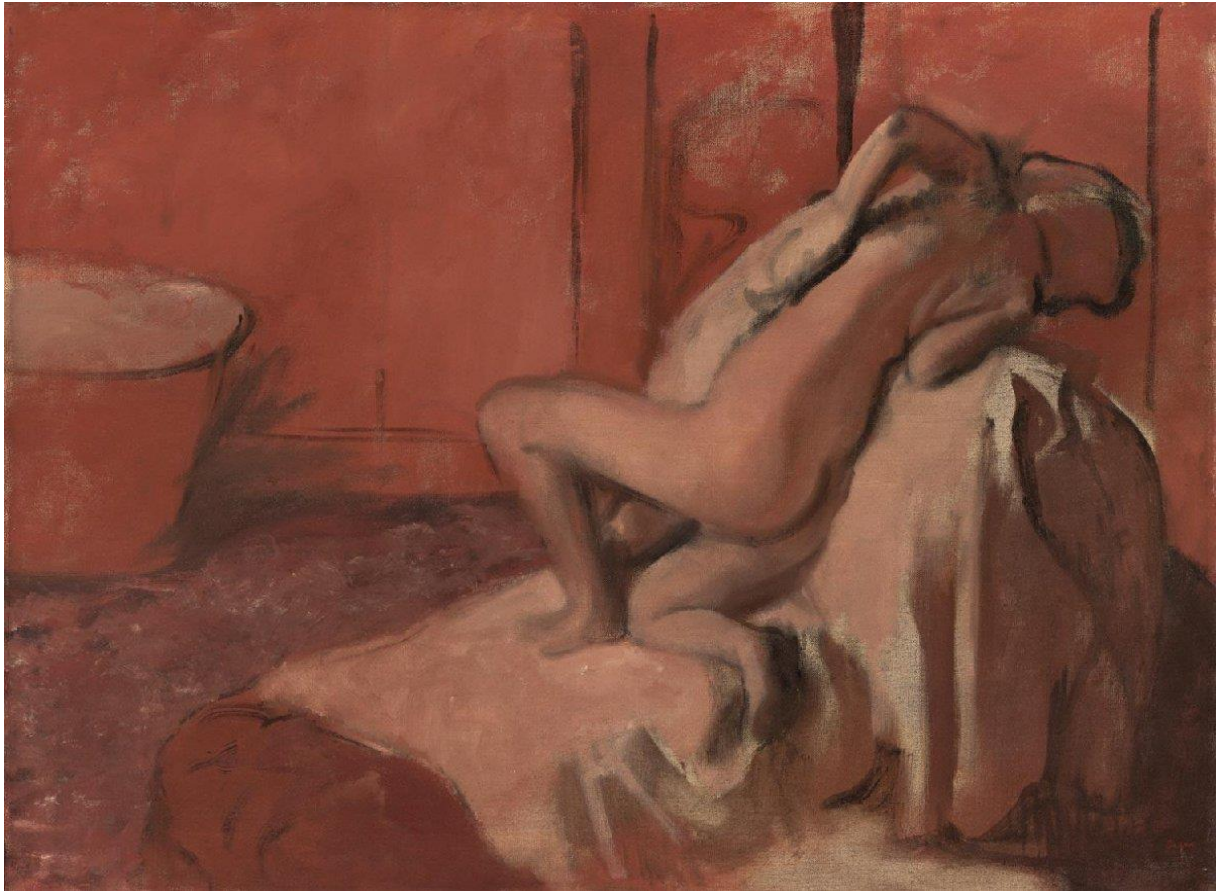
Fischl, Feeding the Turtle

## EDGAR DEGAS



Degas, After the Bath (photo)

Degas arranged his photographic compositions with meticulous care, frequently with a single source of illumination. Fischl places his cast of characters in the full glare of the Californian sun. He photoshops the images to create digital collages which are then projected onto canvas. This approach allows the artist to include elements from anomalous sources to further emphasise the artificial nature of the scenes. In 'Self-portrait with April Gornik', the sunlight appears to come from two different directions. This is not a mistake. In many paintings the figures do not quite seem to occupy the same space. Fischl is making sure the viewer cannot fail to see the awkwardness and the snapshot quality of the work, ideas that Degas would have recognised.



Degas, After the Bath (painting)

## JENNY SAVILLE



Jenny Saville, The Mothers, 2011





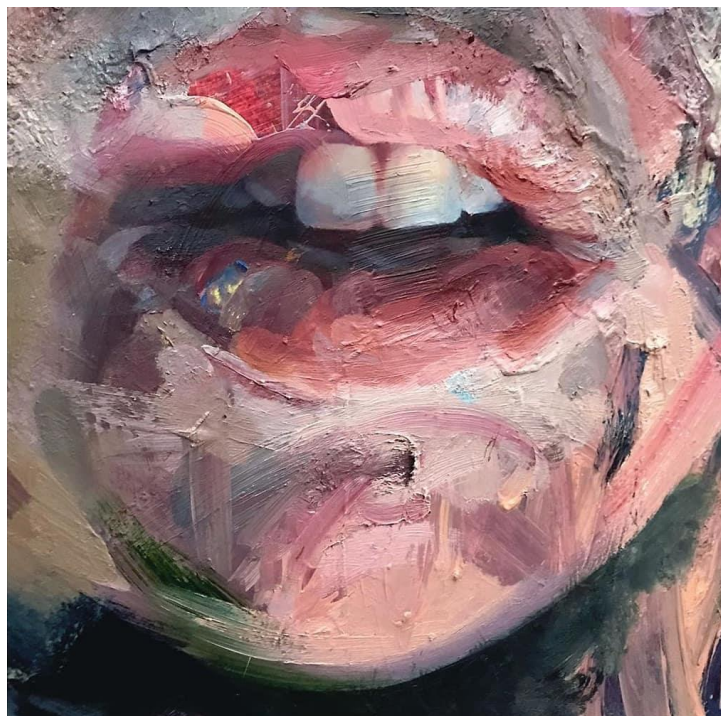
Jenny Saville, *The Mothers*, 1998



Jenny Saville, *Reverse*, 2002-3



Jenny Saville, Self Portrait



Jenny Saville, Self Portrait (Detail)

Jenny Saville paints enormous figures, frequently self-portraits, and frequently with a strong suggestion of violence or emotional damage. Like Degas, she uses her own photographs or

photographs of herself. She then has the photographs enlarged to the same dimensions as the canvas. The image is drawn onto the canvas from the giant photograph. Saville regards this drawing as a scaffolding onto which she can begin the real business of painting: colour.

The colour bespeaks suffering, fear, defeat and death. Like the work of Francis Bacon, Saville's work is both gruesome and ravishingly beautiful.

Bacon said he wanted his paint to work directly on the nervous system. Saville has a similar ambition.

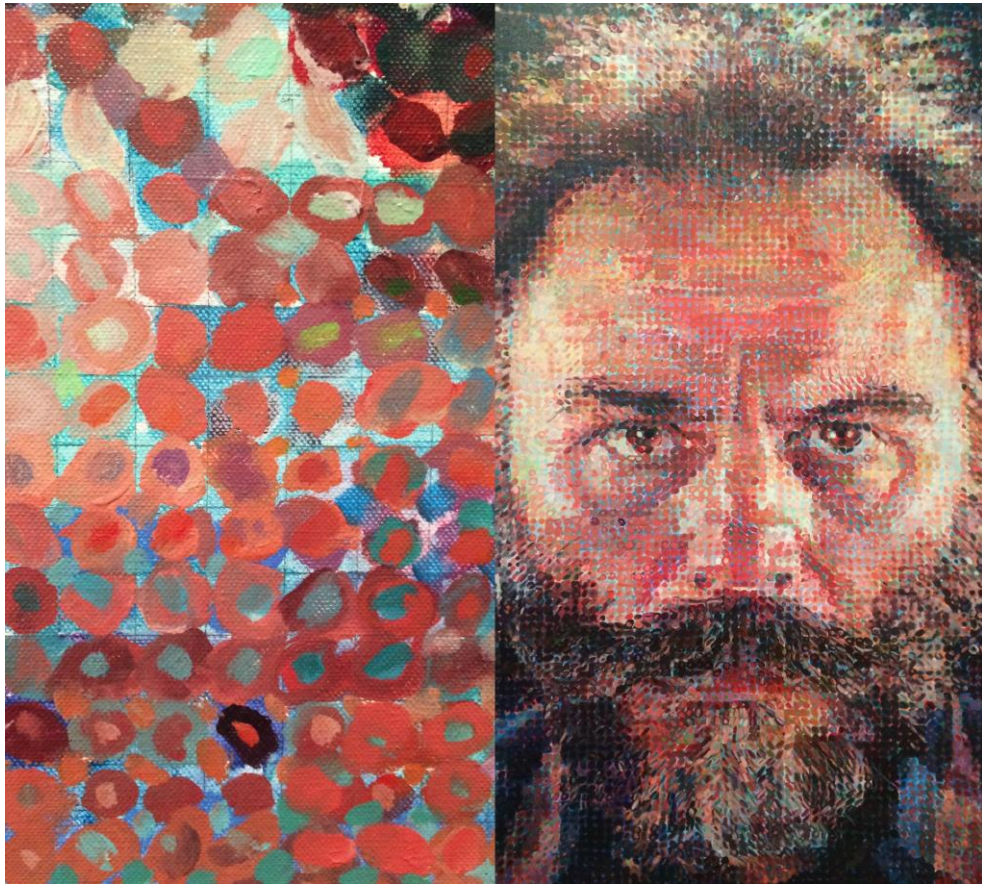
## **CHUCK CLOSE**



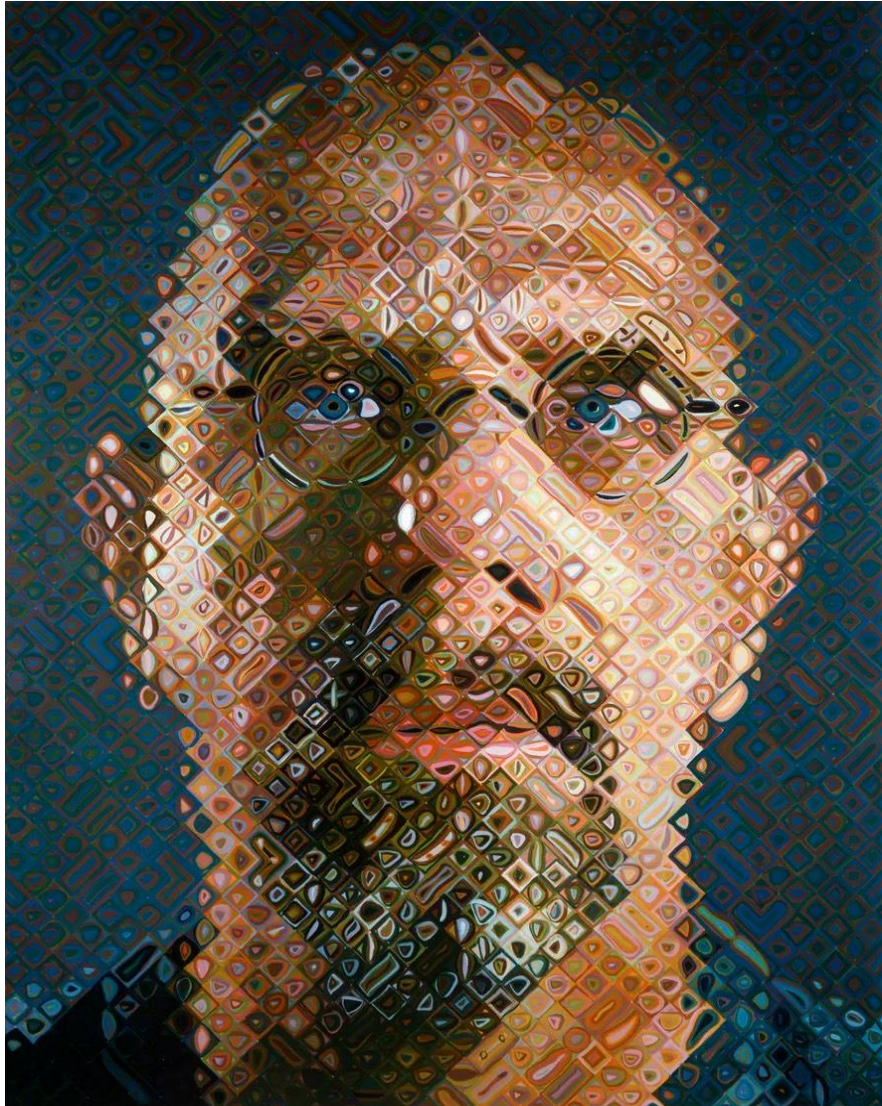
Phil, 1969



Lucas + Detail



Self Portrait, detail



Self Portrait



Chuck Close was a pioneering American photo-realist who, like Jenny Saville, worked on a colossal scale. As a young painter he showed precocious facility with the paintbrush and appeared destined to become an Abstract Expressionist. In a strategic move he opted to make his life more difficult by working in a medium in which he had no skill or experience. He began painting with an airbrush. He used black and white photographs as source material for large-scale portraits of friends and family. He used a grid to transfer the image onto canvas, starting at the top left.

In a pattern that was repeated throughout his life, he deliberately made his work more challenging when it appeared to be getting too easy to do. Using a bewildering variety of materials and techniques, he began working in colour, applying the paint with a brush in the form of dots. Still relying on the grid, he 'averaged' the coloured dots in each rectangle to achieve a dazzling pixilated photographic clarity.

The direction of Close's work was also affected by his health. He suffered illness throughout his childhood and was further afflicted by a condition called prosopagnosia or 'face blindness', which made it difficult for him to recognise faces; hence his devotion to portraiture. It was hard to do.

The paintings of this early period are so finely wrought that even at close inspection they are indistinguishable from photographs.

In 1988 Close had a stroke that left him paralysed from the neck down. He made a partial recovery but spent the rest of his life in a wheelchair.

He continued to paint with undiminished energy and purpose. With the help of an assistant, he continued enlarging images using the grid on a huge scale. His paintbrush was strapped to his arm. Because of his reduced mobility, the images were built up of coarser, larger coloured marks. The results are no less striking and inventive than his earlier work. Close didn't just 'use' photographs; the photograph was his subject matter.

Close died in 2021.