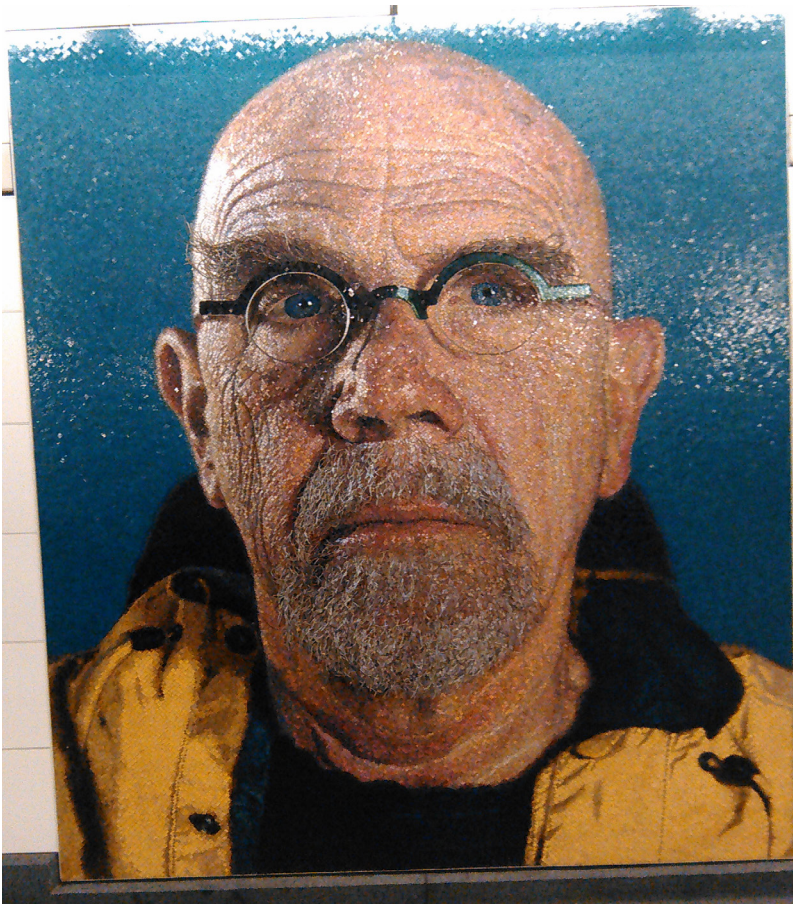


Chuck Close, 86th St subway mosaics, NYC

(My original handwritten notes for this were written on 10/21/17. After putting them into this digital form today, I have added some after-thoughts at the end of this text.)

On my way uptown, I stumble upon the set of Chuck Close mosaics in the 86th Street station of the new Q line. Stunning! (most of them).

Fascinating the way the imagery is broken down, in most cases, into irregular patterns of colored mosaic. This is quite different from what Close has done in the past. Rather than the very regular grid structures that he has used in the past, here he used very irregular patterns and forms, sometimes following the curves of a specific visual form, as in the whiskers of his own mustache,...



...and sometimes even more irregular, as in the patterns around the eye of the Alex Katz portrait.



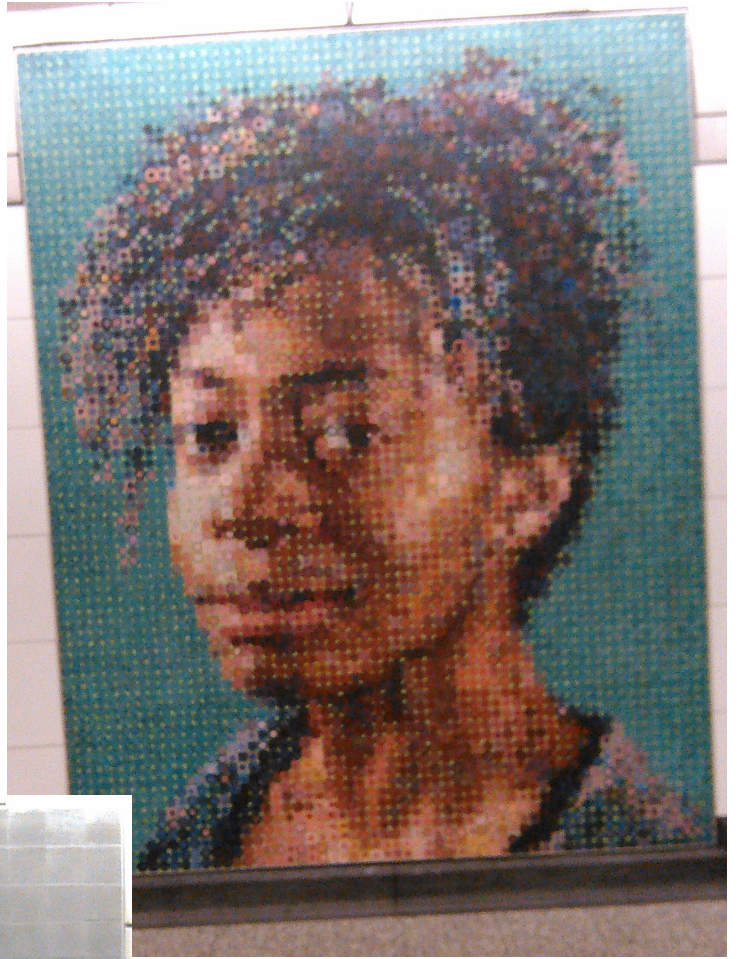
This not the case, however, with two (or all?) of the female portraits, which used circular patterns. As here in *Cindy*.



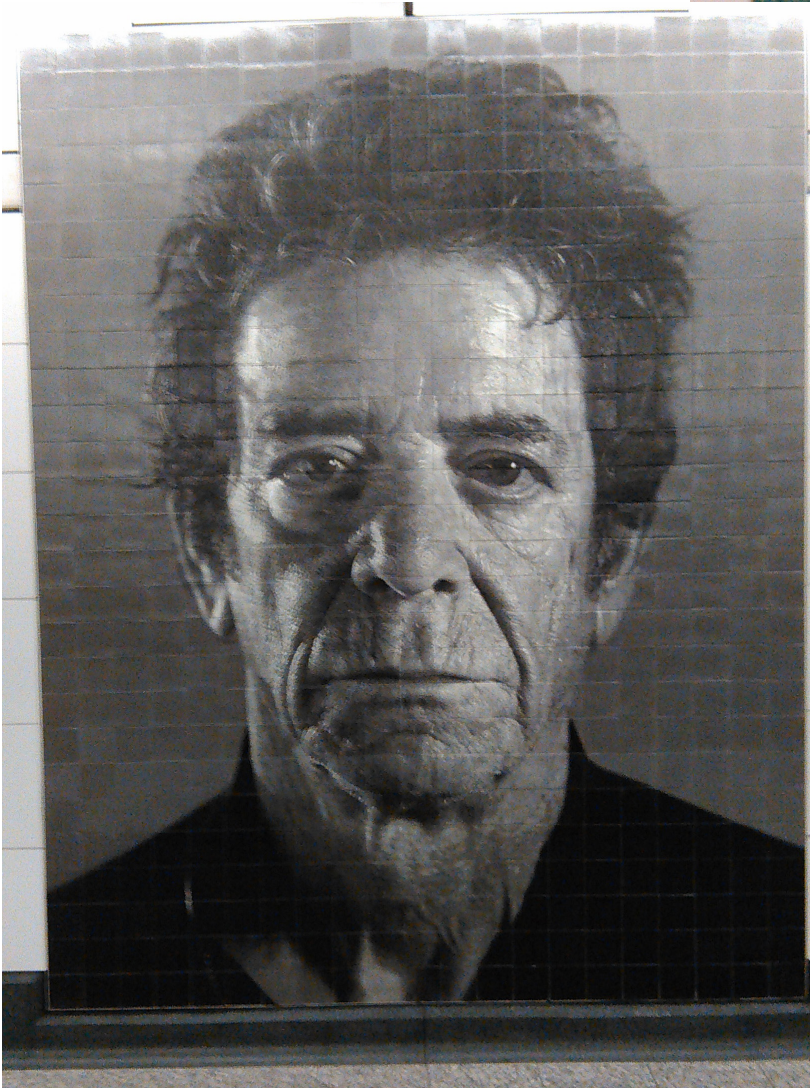
The circular patterns are extremely difficult to see mimetically. They appear as an abstract, almost Islamic, pattern of tiles. I have to move about five feet away from this pattern before I see it as her right eye+nose (left side of image as we look at it).

Seems Close is/has been very concerned with some of the same epistemological issues I've been concerned with: How do we know what we know? How do we create sense from the jumble of visual stimuli we receive? How do we assemble that jumble into an "image", then interpret that image as a portrait? Then from that jumble/portrait, recognize in (CC's case) the famous and known person — Alex Katz, Lou Reed,....

And this. The female portraits struck me as less powerful. Partly this was the frontality of the male portraits. Only the *Cindy* portrait was frontal; the other two female portraits were partially profiled, 45%. The frontality is more aggressive, more “in your face” – literally in your face. All the men — *self-portrait*, *Alex*, *Lou* — are frontal and in your face.



And also the men are not pretty. Quite the contrary — they are rough looking, quite rough looking, all three of them — worn, weathered, craggy, rough looking. Here, *Lou*.



The women, by contrast, are pretty, with one of them being strikingly beautiful (below). The super-large, overwhelming size (each mosaic image is about 10' tall) should make the images aggressive, and it does with the rough, frontal males. But large scale doesn't have that aggressive effect with the pretty and non-frontal females.



And this detail, which I noticed only while assembling these photos: The tops of some of the images fade off. The image doesn't go full to the top. It falls apart, deteriorates, fades out. *Ceci n'est pas une image. Ceci n'est pas un portrait. – Ceci n'est qu'une collection de couleurs.* But... this is only true of the three male portraits. It is not true of the three female portraits, in all three of which the image goes full to the top of the rectangular frame.

And more thoughts about the “famous people” aspect of all this. We start with deciphering the strange imaging marks of the images. This then leads to recognition of a human-face representation (mimesis). Recognition of a human face then leads to recognition of this specific and famous human face. What is going on here? This adds another level perceptually to the whole process of making sense of these images. Image marks/stuff → “face” → specific, known face → famous (and therefore admired?) face. The last step — famous/admired — has nothing to do with the human perceptual system; it has to do with the human cultural system. Which system, à la Derrida, “frames” our perceptual system.

Addendum, one year after the above comments:

In the months after I wrote the above, a number of young women came forward with accusations of sexual harassment and exceedingly inappropriate behavior by Mr. Close while these women were posing for him. Given these accusations, the observations above about Close's different handling of the female portraits *vis à vis* the male portraits perhaps takes on additional significance.