

# Art in America

INTERNATIONAL REVIEW

## Chuck Close Shows Lucas Samaras to 5 Million

by yasha wallin 01/11/11

Chuck Close says he's not a fan of public art—which should come as a surprise considering the American painter has just unveiled his most accessible endeavor to date, a fleet of New York City taxis bearing his imagery. It's estimated to be viewed by over five million people. ART ADDS is the brainchild of Art Production Fund and John Amato, an avid art collector and president of Show Media, a company that owns nearly half of the city's taxi-top billboards. As a holiday present to himself and art lovers, Amato donated ad space on 500 yellow cabs, valued at approximately \$100,000, to host the work of Close and the painter Kehinde Wiley through the month of January.



COURTESY OF ART PRODUCTION FUND

One of the most visible artists of our time, Close became well known for his photorealistic, large-scale portraits. For his contribution to New York's city streets, he selected details from black-and-white photographs of his friends, the artists Lorna Simpson and Lucas Samaras. The concept was to take the areas of the face that would normally be covered by a black bar on television, if the intention were to disguise someone's identity. In Close's version, this area is displayed in reverse, showing only the subject's eyes and mouth. In Samaras' case his moustache highlighted, which Close finds amusing. "A lot of people are going to think it's a vagina—an old school bush," he says. The images were captured years ago, but endured for the artist: "There was this intensity, especially with Lucas staring out in this almost Svengali-like mind control and also Lorna's eyes are poignant."

Close, who suffered a paralyzing spinal injury in 1988, has a wheelchair-accessible van, but he's pushed to have his work atop some of the handicap cabs. And while Close is enthusiastic about his work riding around Manhattan—where he opened his first solo exhibition in 1968—his trepidation with public art is rooted in the belief that everyone should make their own decision to see it. "When you are bumping into art and you're not in the mood for it, or not interested in it, or can't stand it, then art can become sort of an irritant," he explains. "Duchamp said that the artist only had 50% of the responsibility and that was to get the work out, but it's not complete until the viewer returns it to the artist. That is a social contract in a sense."

Nevertheless, with ART ADDS, Close is happy to engage a wider audience. He hopes the photos, replacing those of advertisements, will make people think about the nature of commerce. "One of the things that's so shocking about seeing this [project] is that you can't figure out what it's selling. We're so used to anything in an advertising context promoting the sale of something that you're actually thrown for a loop if you don't understand why it's there."



Nothing is glamorous about his billboards. The subjects are presented just as they are—crow's feet and all, and that's exactly the point. If the 30 degree weather weren't enough incentive to hail a cab in the month of January, a chance to see one world's most renowned artist's work might give a whole new meaning to the term "moustache rides."