

# Art | 41 | Basel | 16–20 | 6 | 10

Booth G9

Alexander Gray Associates presents a micro-survey of New York-based, African-American abstract painter, **Jack Whitten**. On exhibit are paintings spanning forty years, presenting a range of material inventions and social content in Whitten's career. Notable are paintings from the 1970s, including works from series in the permanent collections of the Museum of Modern Art, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Whitney Museum, the Cleveland Museum and the Studio Museum in Harlem.



Martin Luther King's Garden, 1968

Jack Whitten's experiments with painting began in the **1960s**, when inspired by Abstract Expressionism, he created dynamic works noted for their raucous colors and density of gesture—emotionally complex meditations on Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.; the Civil Rights Movement; and the Vietnam War. In 2007, MoMA/PS1 exhibited these paintings, including *Martin Luther King's Garden* (1968) for the first time since his 1968 show at the Alan Stone Gallery in New York, with an epic memorial painting, *9.11.01* (2006).

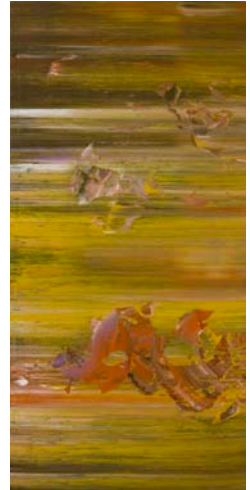
In the **1970s**, Whitten's experimentation turned to abstraction, when he developed new methods of painting, in which brushstroke was removed from the making of the work; instead, paint and canvas were processed, using large troughs to hold paint, and dragging canvas across, with squeegees, rakes, and Afro combs to create surface texture, line, and voids. Such works, including *Chinese Doorway* (1974) were the subject of a 1974 solo exhibition at the Whitney Museum, curated by the late Marcia Tucker. Also in Basel, the gallery is proud to exhibit *Siberian Salt Grinder* (1974) a painting spotlighted in the landmark exhibition *High Times, Hard Times: New York Painting 1967–1975*, organized by Independent Curators International (curated by Katy Seigel) that completed its international tour in 2008. Works on paper and examples of paintings from *Greek Alphabet* series of the late 1970s will also be on hand.



Siberian Salt Grinder, 1974

The **1980s** saw further experimentation with paint as a metaphor for skin, with Whitten "casting" surfaces and textures with acrylic paints and compounds. In works such as *Southern Exposure* (1986), Whitten combines gesture with aspects of sculpture and collage, at a time when narrative-based and didactic work was de rigeur for Black artists. In the **1990s** and **2000s**, Whitten's experiments with paint as a medium moved further towards sculpture, as paint compounds were transformed into mosaic-like tiles and were applied to canvases, referencing ancient architecture and murals. In this work, and into the current work, memorial and personae became sources for content, as works paid homage to celebrated figures and close friends of the artist, such as the painting *E-Stamp II (The Black Butterfly: For Bobby Short)* (2007).

Along with the gallery's 2007 and 2009 exhibitions, Whitten's work is enjoying focused critical reevaluation from curators, critics, and art historians. In 2008, the Atlanta Contemporary Arts Center presented a major survey exhibition which specifically explored the memorial content of Whitten's ongoing work. Whitten's work has been included in landmark exhibitions, including *Contemporary Black Artists in America* at the Whitney Museum (1971), *Energy/Experimentation: Black Artists and Abstraction 1964–1980* at the Studio Museum in Harlem (2006). His work is in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; the Studio Museum in Harlem, New York; the Birmingham Museum of Art, Birmingham, AL; the High Museum of Art, Atlanta; the Cleveland Art Museum, Cleveland OH; and the Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.



Chinese Doorway, 1974



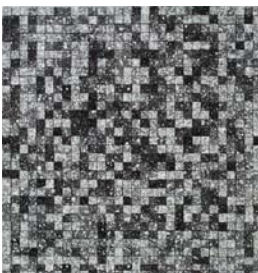
Epsilon Group I, 1976



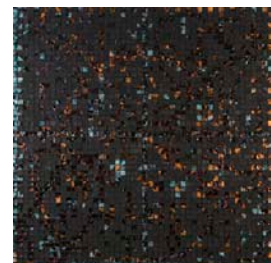
Study for Lapsang and Chinese Sincerity #6, 1975



Southern Exposure, 1986



Data, 1991



E-Stamp II (The Black Butterfly: For Bobby Short), 2007