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# MODERN PAINTERS

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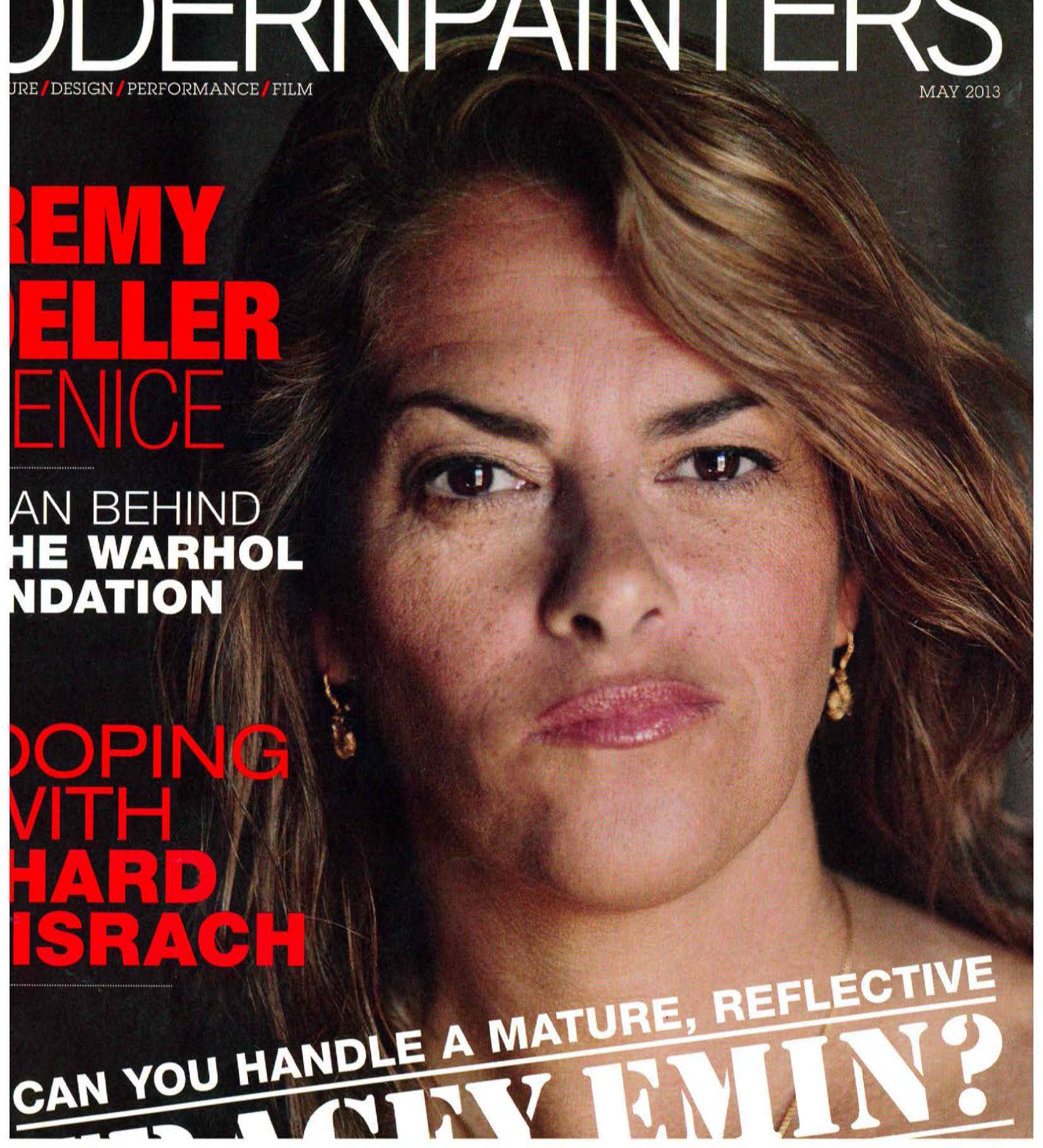
MAY 2013

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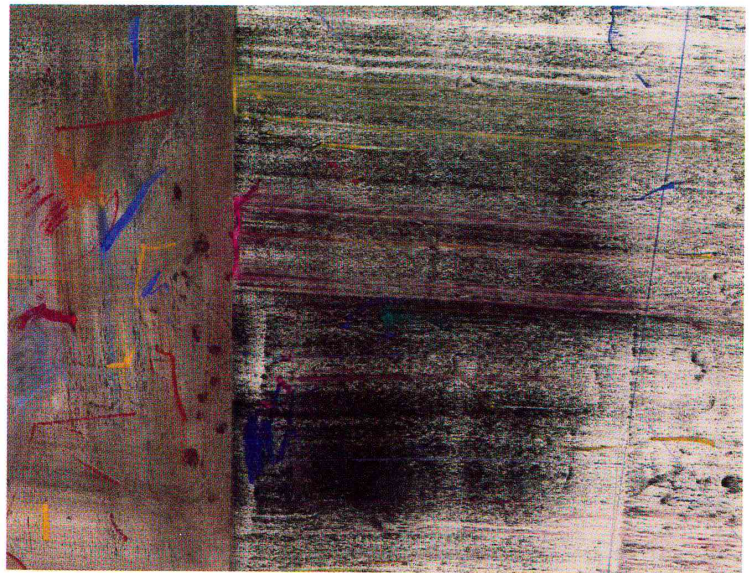
## SAVANNAH, GEORGIA

### Jack Whitten

Savannah College of Art and Design Museum of Art //  
December 18, 2012–March 31, 2013

LIKE MANY OTHER YOUNG artists in New York in the mid 1960s, Whitten worked under the influence of Abstract Expressionism. And like many others, when he finally rejected the style to find his own, he did so unequivocally, adopting photographic and technological language to reconceptualize the gesture as something non-relational. By the early '70s, he had replaced the verb *to paint* with *to make*, largely abandoned color for tonalities of black and white, and began to think of his studio as a laboratory where he could “process” art. Whitten was able not only to distance himself formally and materially from the established language of abstraction but also to arrive at something entirely new.

A selection of Whitten's 1970s investigations are assembled in “Erasures.” The title's multiple readings are intentional. We're meant to see these works as an erasure of the Ab-Ex gesture, art history, and the act of painting itself. Whitten started experimenting with acrylic mediums (testing various new formulas manufactured especially for him) that could provide some surfaces with the flat, matte quality of a photograph or a mechanically reproduced image. His process was physical: Working on the floor, he manipulated swaths of paint on canvas not with a brush but with such implements as Afro combs, rakes, and saw blades. These he would drag across the surface in a single stroke—the movement was meant to be fast, as in photography—scraping away pigment to leave a composition of horizontal lines that sometimes veils other forms. Looking at a work like *Untitled Study #2*, 1972, is akin to viewing a gestural abstraction through a venetian blind. The black-and-white “Epsilon Group” paintings from 1977 suggest aerial photographs, maps of



ABOVE:  
**Jack Whitten**  
*Untitled Study*  
#2, 1972.  
Pastel and  
powdered  
pigment  
on paper,  
20 x 26 in.

BELOW:  
**Gülsün**  
**Karamustafa**  
Installation  
view of *The*  
*Monument*  
of *Kitsch 2*,  
1988–2013.

undetermined locations, nighttime surveillance footage, or TV static.

This period of Whitten's output, which cannot be easily placed on the Minimalist and post-Minimalist continuum, is just beginning to get the attention it merits. His historical importance is beyond debate, but part of why these works have such an immediate appeal today is their uncanny prescience. With their incidental, off-register marks and resemblance to digital screens, his works prefigure everything from Gerhard Richter's squeegee paintings to Wade Guyton's printer accidents. Few formal cues readily connect these works to a particular decade; these paintings could have been made yesterday or tomorrow. But it's not so much that Whitten's art is predicated on his being ahead of his time but that he could eradicate temporal specificity altogether—the ultimate erasure. —Meghan Dailey



## ISTANBUL

### Gülsün Karamustafa

Rodeo // February 2–March 2

“TALISMAN” IS A QUIET elaboration on the artist's ongoing interest in fusing her intimate research process—buying items from *sahafs*, stores that sell old printed matter, such as postcards and books—in a way that complicates what we consider research, without ever being naive. Using materials ranging from found film to sculptures of found objects, Karamustafa implicates viewers in narratives that are ominous in their simplicity and elegance, in clear contrast with the title of the exhibition. Further accentuating the slippage between the setup and the quotidian is the fact that the gallery has recently moved to an apartment space from its former Tophane neighborhood location, meaning that visitors now walk through an exhibition split into multiple rooms, with each room containing no more than one work.

Karamustafa's use of objects and correspondence hints at how we become involved with such things in our domestic spaces. She collapses time and space and the distinctions between the home and everywhere outside it by presenting works that we can immediately relate to but that become divorced from their attachments

postcards, written in Ottoman Turkish, which uses Arabic script. She then translates and transcribes this text in her handwriting, sometimes encircling the original material, exposing the interpretative nature of this talismanic act as she takes one form and shape of communication to produce another.

The exhibition culminates in a work from 1988, *A Cross Section of Turkish Avantgarde/No. 5*, reconfigured to fit the gallery's backroom. The square red carpet on the floor (reminiscent of those used until a couple of decades ago in state museums in Turkey), combined with a smaller, fake-grass carpet, serves to accentuate the glass display in the middle. Inside are two dresses back to back, one blue, the other pink, brightly lit from within in florescent lighting. The work is self-contained, self-sufficient, and self-dramatized; the monolithic construction and architectural emphasis attract viewers to it, while provoking them to walk around it. The talismans conclude with this monument. It becomes charged with meaning as visitors move around the room—involving their bodies in a way that