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**JACK WHITTEN.**

Born and raised in Bessemer, Alabama in 1939 he moved to New York City in 1960 to attend The Cooper Union. He began his earliest experiments in painting during the 1960s by creating dynamic works inspired by Abstract Expressionism. Noted for raucous colors and density of gesture combined with topical content, his artwork of this period manifests emotionally complex meditations on Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., the Civil Rights movement and the Vietnam War.  

Experimentation turned to abstraction for Whitten in the 1970s; a new method of painting developed, one that resonates more closely with photography. Gesture is removed from the making of the work; the paint and canvas are “processed”, produced from large troughs of paint dragged across the canvas with tools including squeegees, rakes, and Afro combs. This process yields palpable surface texture, line, and void. 

Paint became a metaphor for skin during the 1980s when Whitten experimented with “casting” acrylic paints and compounds to create new surfaces and textures. In contrast to the narrative-based and didactic work made by many African-American artists during this period, Whitten’s artworks reintroduce gesture with aspects of sculpture and collage.  Since the 1990s, Whitten’s experiments with paint as a medium have progressed further towards sculpture, beginning with transforming paint compounds into tiles, and applying them to the canvas as mosaics. These artworks allude to ancient architecture and murals, and serve as both an homage to and memorial of celebrated public figures and intimate friends. Recently, Whitten has repurposed the gamut of techniques he developed over the decades to deepen his engagement with art history, re-contextualizing his experimentations to achieve innovative new surfaces, structures, and symbols.

A retrospective exhibition of Whitten’s work will be presented at the Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego, CA in Fall, 2014.

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