

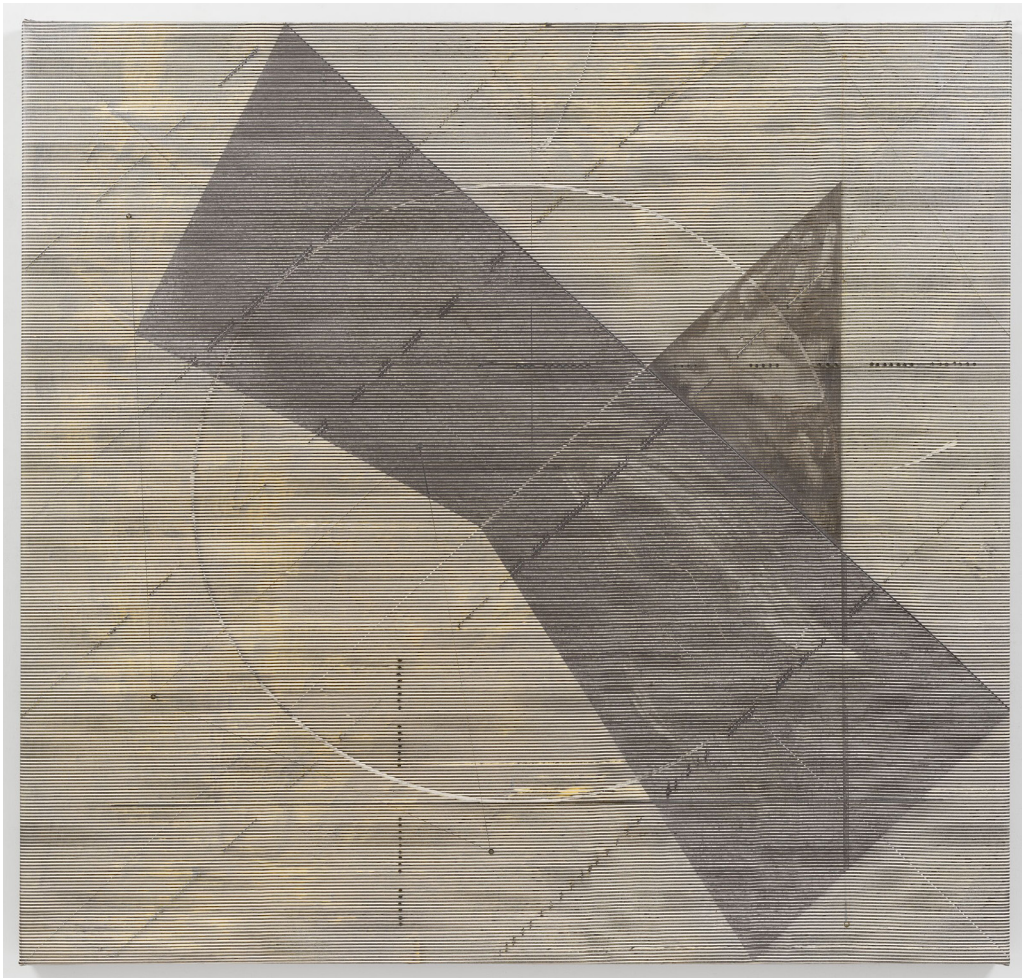
Press Release

Jack Whitten. Not just a formal exercise

Hauser & Wirth. Frieze New York 2023

Stand B09, 17 May – 21 May

- Curated one-person stand
- Never before seen works by Jack Whitten



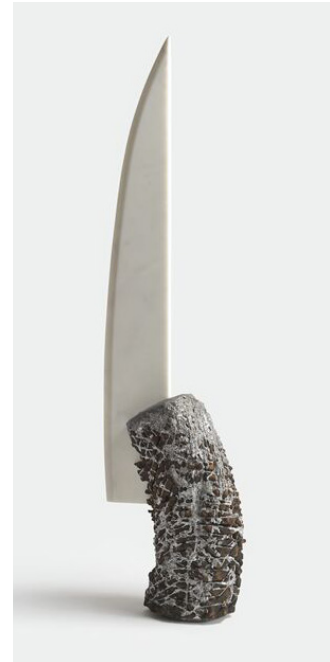
Untitled, 1976

New York....Hauser & Wirth's stand at Frieze New York 2023 is dedicated to a solo presentation of work by late American abstractionist Jack Whitten (1939-2018). One of the most influential artists of his generation, Whitten is renowned for his innovative processes, applying and transfiguring paint in works equally concerned with materiality, politics and metaphysics. This highly curated selection of paintings, works on paper and sculpture not only examines Whitten's tireless technical experimentation over six decades of making, but reconsiders his use of an intentionally restrained black and white palette. Stemming from a desire to combine the formal elements of color with their political and sociological associations, Whitten recognized that '...getting rid of all the chroma and taking it to black and white is not just a formal exercise. I'm very much aware of the meaning of black and white in American society, which informs who I am as an African American.'

HAUSER & WIRTH



Xeroxed!, III, 1975

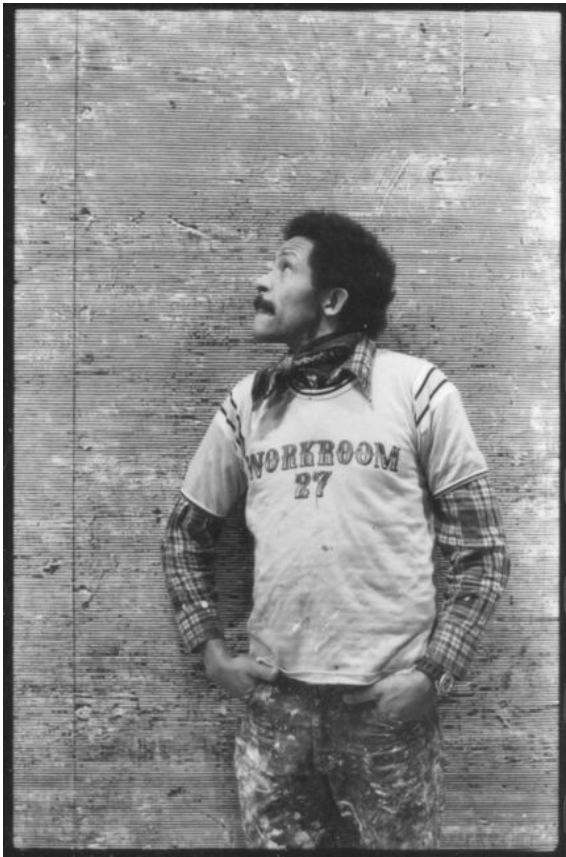


The Apollonian Sword, 2014

This special presentation features monochromatic works from each decade of Whitten's remarkable and ever-evolving career, chronicling his formal development as an artist and relentless material innovation. From the small ethereal 'ghost' paintings of the 1960s and works on paper made with Xerox's electrostatic printing technology in the 1970s to the tessellated acrylic paint mosaics he developed in the 1990s, Whitten's black and white compositions foreground the meditative, contemplative and spiritual essence of physical matter. This is also evidenced in his lesser-known sculptural work, which he maintained throughout his life. Whitten believed sculpture fueled his practice and changed how he approached light, saying that 'Without a doubt, the sculpture has had more influence on my painting than anything else. The concept of light is different in a sculptor's mind than it is in a painter's...In carving you're revealing the light in reaction to external light...Through sculpture I have refactored my whole way and approach to painting.'



Heads in Motion XII, Portrait of a Lady I, Heads XIII, 1964



About the artist

Born in Bessemer, Alabama in 1939, Whitten was an active participant in the Civil Rights Movement before moving north to New York City in the early 1960s and enrolling at Cooper Union. Although Whitten initially aligned with the New York circle of abstract expressionists active in the 1960s, his work gradually distanced from the movement's aesthetic philosophy and formal concerns, focusing more intensely on the experimental aspects of process and technique that came to define his practice. In the 1970s, Whitten's experiments with the materiality of paint reached a climax—removing a thick slab of acrylic paint from its support, he realized that the medium could be coaxed into the form of an independent object. Whitten used this mode of experimentation to challenge pre-existing notions of dimensionality in painting, repeatedly layering slices of acrylic ribbon in uneven fields of wet paint to mimic the application of mosaic tesserae to wet masonry. Over the course of a six decade career, Whitten's work bridged rhythms of gestural abstraction and process art, arriving at a nuanced language of painting, which hovers between mechanical automation and intensely personal expression. Jack Whitten: The Greek Alphabet Paintings, the first-ever exhibition devoted to Whitten's Greek Alphabet painting series of 1975-78, is on view at Dia Beacon in New York through 10 July, 2023.

HAUSER & WIRTH

For additional information, please contact:

Andrea Schwan, Andrea Schwan Inc., andrea@andreaschwan.com, +1 917 371 5023

Christine McMonagle, Hauser & Wirth, christinemcmonagle@hauserwirth.com, +1 347 320 8596

Caption and courtesy information:

All Images:

Jack Whitten

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Courtesy the Estate and Hauser & Wirth

Untitled

1976

Acrylic on canvas

181 x 179.1 cm / 71 1/4 x 70 1/2 in

Photo: Sarah Muehlbauer

Xeroxed!, III

1975

Toner and rice paper mounted to canvas stretched

152.4 x 201.9 x 5.1 cm / 60 x 79 1/2 x 2 in

Photo: John Berens

The Apollonian Sword

2014

Marble, metal, lead, charred black mulberry wood

Unique

184 x 56 x 46 cm / 72 1/2 x 22 x 18 1/8 in

Photo: Genevieve Hanson

Heads in Motion XII, Portrait of a Lady I, Heads XIII

1964

Acrylic on canvas, triptych

1. 67.3 x 54.6 cm / 26.5 x 21.5 in

2. 58.1 x 48.9 cm / 22.9 x 19.25 in

3. 61 x 50.8 cm / 24 x 20 in

Photo: Sarah Muehlbauer

Portrait of Jack Whitten

ca. 1974-1975