

For the past 50 years, Jack Whitten has explored the possibilities of paint, the role of the artist, and the allure of material essence in his innovative studio process. With compositions that are abstract and elegiac, Whitten foregrounds the material properties of paint—pigmentation, viscosity, and mark—to capture the momentary and suggest the enduring. Featuring some 60 pieces, the traveling retrospective charts the artist's work across the decades, bringing together his best-known canvases alongside significant but under-recognized bodies of work. This includes Whitten's rarely-seen black-and-white "ghost" paintings of the 1960s, his smeared test "slabs" and dragged canvases of the 1970s, his collaged acrylic "skins" of the 1980s, and his more recent tessellated constructions of paint tiles. The Walker's installation of the exhibition will also include Whitten's *9-11-01* (2006), his iconic memorial to the victims of 9/11; a new painting made specifically for the Minneapolis presentation; and an array of works on paper from the 1960s to the present on loan from the artist and local private collections.

"For five decades Jack Whitten has produced inventive abstract work steeped in questions of history, culture, race, and identity in America," said Olga Viso, Executive Director of the Walker Art Center. "The Walker is thrilled to present the first exhibition to span the full breadth of the artist's work in depth."

Born in Bessemer, Alabama in 1939, Jack Whitten came of age in the segregated South and was an active participant in the civil rights movement before moving to New York City in the early 1960s, where he enrolled at Cooper Union and discovered his own experimental language of abstraction. As a young painter, Whitten moved freely between communities of racially-identified artists and those associated with the New York School whom he met at the Cedar Bar. Throughout the 1970s as he honed his materials-based experimentations, Whitten emphasized formal innovation and devised tools to help produce his effects—long-handled squeegees, rakes, and serrated combs that allowed him to realize the total picture plane in a single gesture. Many of the resulting works were featured in Whitten's 1974 one-person exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art.

By the 1980s and 1990s, Whitten amplified his treatment of acrylic paint by casting it as a "skin" and using it as a material for collage. Taking imprints of screens, grates, textures, and other surfaces, Whitten produced dense compositions, layered in reference and visual effect. Later, collage manifested itself in his work through tessellated constructions, wherein he created paint tiles and adhered them to canvas—breaking down the paint to remake the painting. As the century turned, Whitten's ordering devices began to reference new technologies for tracking and cataloguing—bar codes and apps—the geometry of the information age. Across the decades, he has continually been an artist of his moment due to his respect for the past and commitment to the present day, with

poetic and physically compelling compositions that reinvent the medium of painting time and again.

Recently, Whitten's work has been featured at the Brooklyn Museum, NY; 55th Venice Biennale, Italy; Atlanta Contemporary Art Center, GA; MoMA PS1, NY; and Studio Museum in Harlem, NY; among others. His work is represented in the collections of the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN; Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego, CA; Museum of Modern Art, NY; Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY; Tate Modern, London; Whitney Museum of American Art, NY; Art Institute of Chicago, IL; Dallas Museum of Art, TX; Birmingham Museum of Art, AL; and High Museum of Art, Atlanta, GA; among others. Whitten received an Honorary Doctorate from the San Francisco Art Institute in 2014, and lives in New York City.

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