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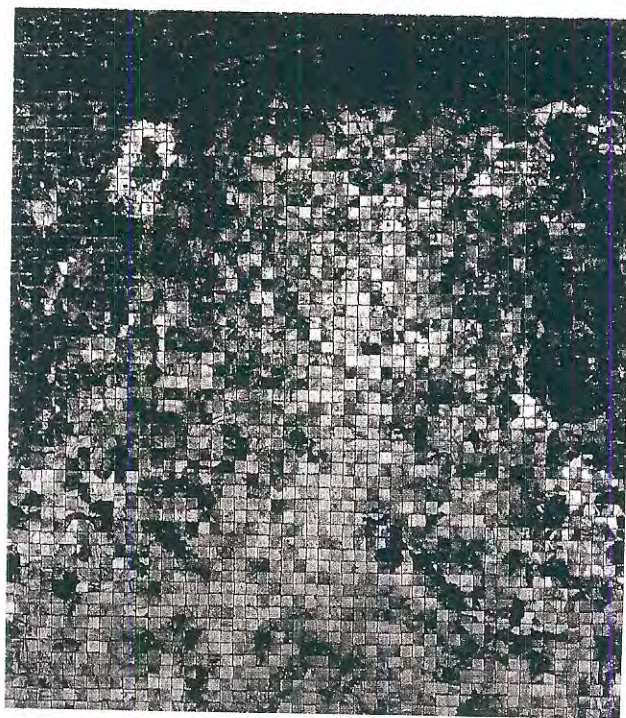
### Jack Whitten at Horodner Romley

Jack Whitten came to New York to study art in 1960 and had his first solo show here in 1969. He has always painted abstractions and focused on procedure. The handsome, low-key grid paintings in this recent show were essentially mosaics made from small squares of acrylic paint. Whitten begins his works by pouring or splashing thin layers of paint onto sheets of plastic. He uses white along with either black or brown, and the light-and-dark mix yields oily, irregular

like form against a white background. Looking at these, you may squint to see whether a face will come into focus as in a Chuck Close work. No such image emerges, but, as with Close's paintings, you find yourself shifting back and forth between modes of perception: from the overall optical image to the tactile physical surface to the intimate encounter with each unique incremental square in which something of that physical/illusionistic duality is microscopically reflected.

Whitten's most ambitious painting in the show gave this duality a cosmic spin. *Homecoming: for Miles*, which measures 81 by 105 inches, is made of finely spattered black, gray and white one-inch squares (about 8,000 of them). These are arranged so as to create an irregularly blotchy field suggestive of a starry sky, thus establishing the opposition between illusory space and the palpable tile-like surface. But Whitten has done more: he has organized squares bearing prominent white drips into a great circle, from the center of which white dotted lines radiate. Although it initially appears to have been added after the gluing-on of the tesserae, this weblike system was actually puzzled together in the assembly process, as you can see on close examination. The painting is, in other words, an elaborately crafted piece of work. As an image, the dotted-line system is suggestive of musical sound waves (going by the title's reference to Miles Davis), but also, possibly, of astronomical magnetic waves or some sort of heavenly, archetypal geometry. That is to say, more than just playing with process and form, Whitten is extending the tradition of spiritual metaphor in modernist abstraction—he is devoted as much to the imaginal soul as to the material body of formalist painting.

—Ken Johnson



Jack Whitten: *Dark Horizon*, 1992, acrylic on canvas, 58 by 52 inches; at Horodner Romley.