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Jack Whitten, *Xeroxed!*, 1975, toner and rice paper mounted to canvas, 57.88h x 73w in (147.02h x 185.42w cm)

Spotlight Section | Stand H7

Jack Whitten: Experiments with Toner

Alexander Gray Associates presents work on paper by Jack Whitten (b.1939) created between 1974 and 1975. A pivotal moment in Whitten's process-oriented practice, the works on view are made from the manipulation of toner on paper, emblematic of the artist's prodigious experimentation that has continued to influence his practice in subsequent decades.

Whitten defines the year 1974 as the first time he set up experiments for himself with objectives, describing his activities as "laboratory work." It was also during this year when his first encounter with toner as a medium occurred during a research grant at the Xerox Corporation headquarters in Rochester, NY. Returning to his New York studio after the residency, the work that emerged explored the dry and highly sensitive material as their subject, expanding Whitten's interest in photography as an analogy to painting. As art historian Kellie Jones explains, this connection "...was not a nod to figuration but his way of considering the painted surface as something developed and activated by process." Through the application of loose toner each piece takes on a topographical quality. As a former airman-in-training at the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama in 1958, the idea of perceived borders and demarcations has had a lasting influence on his practice. Never far removed from the social and political, Whitten looked to his studies with toner as a way to transmit information akin to the images being projected into the world that had never been seen before, including war-time aerial photographs and lunar landscapes.

Exhibited together for the first time, the presentation includes a selection of individual "Xerox monotypes" and two large scale canvases made from the collaging of forty-two individual works on rice paper that have been "processed" through a series of methods aimed to transfer toner directly to the paper surface. Whitten used a variety of techniques to randomly distribute the toner to different effects, including applying rollers to produce subtle tonal variations; rubbing it to yield sharp lines and irregular textures; and raking a stylus across the page to make thin, horizontal lines that cut across the width of the paper. *Xerox Project* and *Organic Series XII* (both 1974) exemplify these innovative investigations, resulting in dense surfaces of rich textures amplified by shadows and ghosted geometric forms.

Whitten's experiments with toner as a medium have had enduring effects on his later paintings. Whitten situates his shift to the monochromatic palette of the now iconic "Greek Alphabet Series" (1974–1979) to his toner works, along with his continued exploration of the removal of the artist's hand through the use of tools to achieve both speed and spontaneity. Further, the large-scale canvases of *Xeroxed!* and *Xeroxed! III* (both 1975) serve as studies in composition, with an adherence to the grid that forecast his tesseraeted acrylic collage paintings of the 1990s and the topographic surfaces of recent paintings.

Jack Whitten's retrospective, *Jack Whitten: Five Decades of Painting*, is currently on view at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, MN. His work has been exhibited in the 1969 and 1972 Whitney Annuals at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; 55th Venice Biennale, Italy (2013); and a landmark 1974 solo exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art. Whitten's work has been featured at the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, CA (2015); Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, Ridgefield, CT (2014); Museum Dhondt-Dhaenens, Deurle, Belgium (2014); Rose Art Museum, Waltham, MA (2014); New Museum, New York (2013); Savannah College of Art and Design, GA (2012); Atlanta Contemporary Art Center, GA (2008); and MoMA PS1, New York (2007); among others. Whitten is represented in over 30 public collections, including the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Tate Modern, London; Whitney Museum of Art, New York; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN; Art Institute of Chicago, IL; Dallas Museum of Art, TX; Birmingham Museum of Art, AL; Brooklyn Museum, NY; Cleveland Museum of Art, OH; and the Mott-Warsh Collection, Flint, MI; among others.