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## ATLANTA

**Jack Whitten**

**THE ATLANTA CONTEMPORARY ART CENTER**  
**535 Means Street, NW**  
**April 18–June 14**

Jack Whitten has been working as an artist for over forty years. His explorations with paint have taken the form of highly gestural figurative works, thickly layered abstractions with manipulated surfaces, and mosaiclike collages built from shards of hardened acrylic medium colored with various materials. Exhibition organizer Stuart Horodner has found a creative way to represent these different stylistic series by selecting works that share Whitten's tendency to pay tribute to deceased family members and friends who have influenced his life. The earliest piece in "Memorial Paintings" is a canvas from 1968 depicting Martin Luther King, whom the artist met as a young man. The abstract works of the 1970s and '80s are represented by pieces dedicated to Romare Bearden, Duke Ellington, and James Baldwin. The largest body of work, however, reveals the mosaic painting style that Whitten developed in the '90s. Representations from this series pay tribute not only to his mother and father but to artistic figures such as Ralph Ellison, Bobby Short, Miles Davis, and Marcia Tucker, as well as to politician Barbara Jordan.

These highly personal works function less as formal portraits than as suggestions of the essence that Whitten admired in each of his subjects. This oblique compositional technique also drives his impressive ten-by-twenty-foot memorial to the events of 9/11, which he personally witnessed from the street outside his studio in TriBeCa, New York. The multipanel work, which includes a substantial amount of blood, bone, glass, and ash, bound by acrylic paint and medium, is an elegant and haunting tribute to those who died and to the fractured lives the devastation left in its wake.

—Rebecca Dimling Cochran

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*Black Table Setting (Homage to Duke Ellington)*, 1974, acrylic on canvas, 72 x 60".