

are then either cut  
as stills or mounted on foam and cut  
into four and six sided areas.

of abstract painter June ...  
showing through October 14 at the

and some evolve from the experience

far away from the popular center.

# Opposing forces in Jack Whitten's art

Will Grant

For its official inauguration, the Onyx Art Gallery, at 54 Irving Place (near 17th) has the auspicious beginning in the powerful work of Jack Whitten, a young artist who has already frequently exhibited in museums and had much acclaim. In this exhibit until October 28, Onyx sets its policy of forwarding the work of black American artists in exhibitions, as well as publishing editions of their works.

## Creates tensions

Jack Whitten is an artist of considerable skill and imagination who employs opposite means one against the other. The tensions he creates in compelling unlike forces to live together, and by reconciling them or placing them in equilibrium, produce the power of his art. In life, one finds the greatest emotion occurs in conflict contained. By his titles, one imagines that Jack Whitten has produced what he conceives as the visual manifestation of personal emotions, although the work itself remains abstract.

Whitten's series of paintings twenty inches square he calls "Soulspace", whereas the large works are, including "Self Portrait", personal, being dedicated to his wife, to Norman Lewis, Michael Jackson...

## Diverse elements

One's first impression of the paintings is that of heavy impasto



Jack Whitten, one panel of "Top Hat" triptych. Onyx Art Gallery

with visible brush strokes in paints not strongly contrasted in color but creating dynamic activity across the

surface by the roughness of texture caused by the continually intertwaving brushwork.

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Nevertheless, there is a geometric foundation to Whitten's composition. In every work, he includes a few trapezoids, usually considered relationally in the space. In many paintings, a large slim regular circle goes almost to the borders of the square canvas. The trapezoid images are collages in low relief, often painted over to unify the rough surface into the composition. Though the circle is not painted in, it seems, being slender, to bind the composition. Unifying and divisive forces continually 'str the pot'.

## A tour de force

The large three panel painting is a tour de force of many elements. It is different from the other works. This time, swatches of bright colored brush strokes form a ground. Also, there is far more play of the circle. 12 concentric circles intensifying toward the enter of each panel, most of these white circles being against a large central rectangle collage of flat grey. This is perhaps the only painting without trapezoids. While atypical, it does mirror the general function of the exhibit.

## Works on paper

The 'drawings' on paper reveal another aspect of Whitten's art. Lines of bold color imply geometric areas but do not form them. Always, Jack Whitten has the same concern for form and the expression of feeling through abstraction.