

**STUDIO CHECK**

# Stanley Whitney

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"I NEVER THOUGHT I'd paint colored squares," Whitney says, describing his signature abstract canvases. "I feel like you don't have much choice about what you paint, in terms of subject matter: It's who you are." The artist has lived and worked since 1973 in a cavernous loft on Cooper Square in Manhattan; he took the space (formerly used to house small birds for sale) for about \$200 a month. Now, after extensive renovations, it serves as one of two places where Whitney paints: In the summer, he decamps with his wife and son to a converted stone barn in

Parma, Italy. Whitney spent five years teaching in Rome, and the influence of Italian architecture found its way into his work; his later travels in Egypt provided "the last piece of the puzzle, the idea of density," he says. An artist who paints within fairly strict parameters, and generally in a large-scale format, Whitney explains that what's important to him is evidence of a human touch on the canvas; transitions between the blocks of pigment; and, of course, color. "I like things to be natural and a little off," he says. "I want them to be sit-down paintings. People

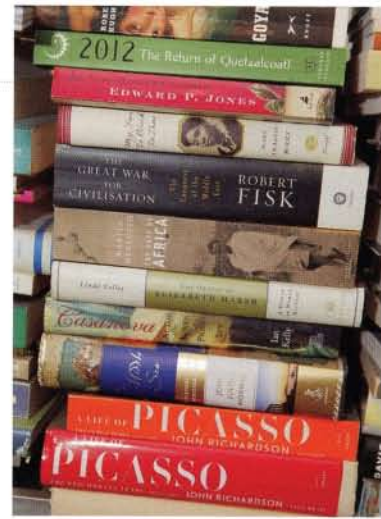
can live with them, and they change."

The studio is adorned with pieces by former teachers (Philip Guston), students (Trenton Doyle Hancock), and peers (Robert Rauschenberg, David Hammons, Al Taylor). Whitney works surrounded by stacks and shelves of books, an extensive music library, and examples of African art (a barbershop sign, a beaded container, wooden masks) that piqued his aesthetic interest. During our visit, the artist was gearing up for two shows, one opening March 29 at Galerie Albert Baronian, in Brussels, the other on April 11 at Team Gallery, in New York. **MP**



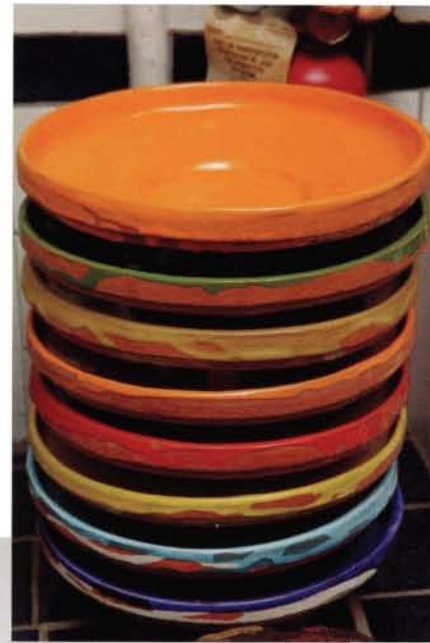
#### ◀ B&W DRAWINGS

"I have always liked color and wanted to make color my subject matter. But these allowed me to really work with space. I was thinking of Van Gogh's drawings, with the idea of each area being a different 'color.' Even though they're black-and-white, every area has a different kind of richness."



#### ◀ BOOKS

"My day is spent in the studio either painting or reading, everything from novels to history to art biographies. I don't read much science fiction but someone turned me on to a black sci-fi writer, Octavia Butler, who's very interesting. Reading keeps me in shape and mentally tough, which helps with the work."



#### ◀ HANDMADE PLATES

"The artist Steve Keister made these in collaboration with Mary Heilmann. The mold is from a case for speaker covers, and he put legs on them. They become these Mexican plates that are great for a dinner party, with all these different colors, and you can stack them when you're done."



#### ◀ NATIVE AMERICAN BOWL

"A friend of mine in Arizona dug this up and glued it back together. I love that you can see how the artist dipped the ink; it goes from dark to light, because the ink is running out. You can feel that someone made it. I want that in my painting, the idea of the human hand, that you can see it was touched."



#### ◀ STUDIO WALL

"(1) The small paintings keep me fluid. I have to do them to make the big ones. (2) This Matisse is so difficult, it's struggle, struggle, struggle. Even the little turtle. It's such an ugly painting, but so beautiful. (3) An image of a Cézanne portrait I've had since graduate school. (4) A photo of Africans that I love because of how dense it is. It's a density I want in the paintings. (5) I made David Hammons give me his heart and sign it. (6) Al Taylor came to New York around the same time I did in the late '60s. This is one of the first 'Puddles' he did. (7) A picture of my son when he was 2 or 3 by Judy Linn, a really underrated photographer."