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## Jaq Belcher: Wonders in White

By Michelle Jones  
December 2011

**I**t all started with a movie, Gwyneth Paltrow's *Country Strong*, to be precise. New York-based artist Jaq Belcher read about the Nashville apartment Paltrow and her family lived in during filming and liked some of the art from Tinney Contemporary featured in the spread. Belcher emailed the gallery and got a call from Susan Tinney a few minutes later. That was more than eighteen months ago; now Belcher is presenting her first Nashville show at the gallery. The nineteen-piece exhibition features large-scale cut-paper drawings, including *Untitled: seeding*, an installation in which the drawing's 33,000 cutouts are arranged on the floor in front of it.

Other works include *Inner Circle*, two concentric, contrasting circles defined by 5,300 cuts, and *Offering*, in which 9,000+ cuts carve a curved path vertically through the piece. Belcher's works are full of voids and raised elements that catch light and cast shadows. Paper leaning in different directions creates tone-on-tone designs and textures, depth and movement. Belcher keeps track of exactly how many cuts she makes in each piece and records that number on the bottom of the drawings.

Though Belcher refers to her work as drawings, drawing is only the first step. After filling large sheets of bright white paper with small ovals and other shapes, she cuts out the forms using an X-Acto knife and hundreds and hundreds of blades. The idea is to create patterns by cutting and removing elements from a single sheet of paper without destroying the paper or making unintentional cuts or tears. (Though Belcher brags about not having made a mistake in the ten years she's been making the cut-paper pieces, she admits to recently breaking her streak while working on one of the Nashville pieces. Initially tempted to "fudge" it, she relented and started over.)

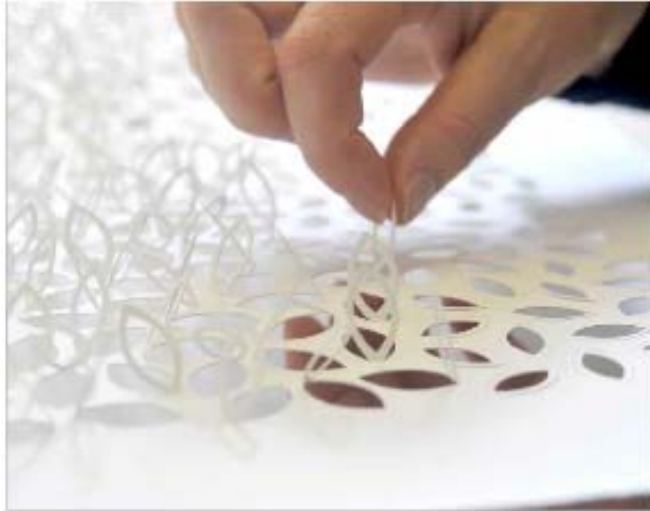
The cut-paper series began in 2001 when Belcher moved from her native Australia to New York and camped out in a tiny apartment with an artist she'd met in Sydney, the only person she knew in the city. He was a watercolorist, and each time he pulled out a fresh sheet of paper, Belcher was struck by the stunning white patina. "I was thinking, anything I did to that would just screw it up," she says. Then she started thinking about working reductively, creating by taking away rather than adding; also she didn't want to do anything that required a lot of tools.

This was a convenient approach because Belcher had gotten rid of most of her things before the move, including the tools she used in her previous medium of metalworking. Feeling liberated from the baggage of possessions and stuff, she wanted to reflect that feeling of lightness in her work.

*"I wanted to explore the kind of repetition found in "Japa," a form of meditation wherein a mantra is spoken over and over again."*

In her work, Belcher enters a similar state of concentration that allows her to focus on the thousands and thousands of cuts each piece requires—and she only works on one piece at a time.

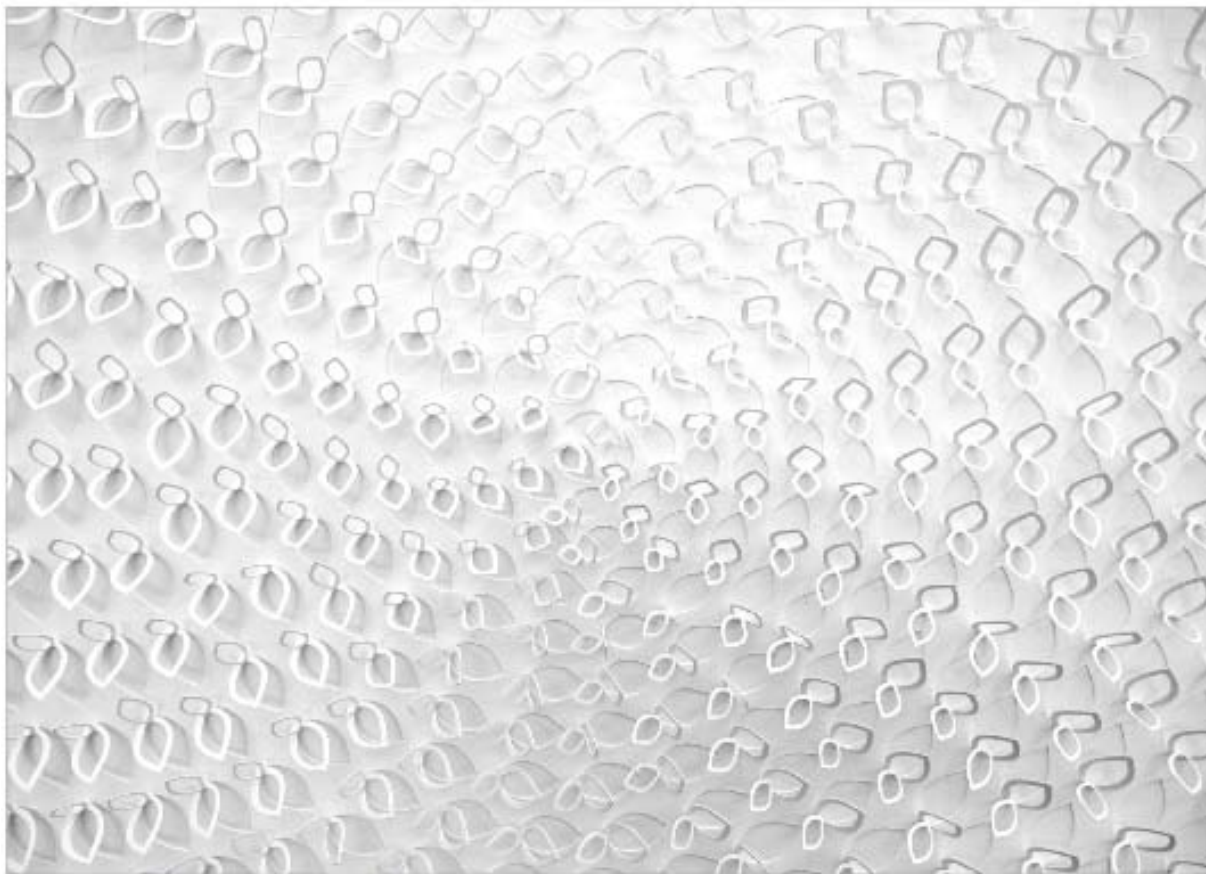
After ten years she still uses the same white printmaking paper she initially chose for its extreme whiteness, eschewing color for the interplay of light on that paper. "They are really



*Form Is Empty*, 2011, Hand-cut paper (5,832 cuts), 42" x 42"

“I thought, what happens if I just remove the matter from this sheet of paper?”

intended to be seen in natural light; they're most beautiful in natural light,” Belcher says of her work. She enjoys watching the cut-paper piece in her apartment change by the hour with the varying light. Gallery lighting, on the other hand, often leaves something to be desired since natural light is



*Spiral Set - six*, 2011, Hand-cut paper (3,744 cuts), 30" x 30"





Archetype, 2011, Hand-cut paper (10,972 cuts), 42" x 42"



sometimes at a premium, Belcher admits. Still, that's part of the nature of the art: whatever light is available adds another dimension to the work.

Accordingly, Belcher was planning to be in Nashville a week before her Tinney Contemporary opening partly to make sure the pictures are shown in the "nicest light possible." But she was actually more excited about another aspect of the gallery. "Tinney Contemporary has that extremely sexy black, shiny floor," she says. "I'm so excited to put work on that." ↵

Jaq Belcher's show *Suchness* will be on view December 3 through January 28 at Tinney Contemporary Gallery, located in downtown Nashville at 237 5th Avenue North. [tinneycontemporary.com](http://tinneycontemporary.com) [jaqbelcher.com](http://jaqbelcher.com)

