



**Dawn Gettler**, hanging cast sugar tiles for *the letter*

## artist biography

**Dawn Gettler** was born and raised in Iowa in 1979 and currently calls Chicago, IL home. In 2006, she received her MFA in printmaking from Ohio University. Gettler has been in various exhibitions and recently completed artist residencies at The Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts, Omaha, NE; Spiro Arts, Park City, UT; ART342, Fort Collins, CO; and The Kimmel Harding Nelson Center for the Arts, Nebraska City, NE. Recent shows include an Invitational Exhibition, *Action is Eloquence*, at the University of Northern Iowa and a Solo Show, *jill came tumbling after*, at the Janalyn Hanson White Gallery at Mount Mercy University. This past spring Dawn was the artist in residence at Spudnik Press in Chicago. Upcoming shows for 2011–2013 include solo shows at the Fitton Center for Creative Arts, Hamilton, OH; Women's Studio Workshop, Rosendale, NY; and The Lux Center for the Arts, Lincoln, NE. Dawn recently received full fellowship residencies at the Women's Studio Workshop and Prairie Center of the Arts, Peoria, IL.

## artspace

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## design

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on the cover:

**Dawn Gettler**, hanging receipt tape coated in glycerin for *jill*



## inspiring creative energy!

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Artspace inspires creative energy! A non-profit visual art center, Artspace presents award-winning exhibitions, educational programs, and artist studios open to the public. Approximately 110 artists are professional members of the Artspace Artists Association with 35 artists maintaining studios at Artspace. Artspace is open to the public Tues.-Sat., from 10 AM–6 PM and on the first Friday of each month for the First Friday Gallery Walk until 10 PM. Studio hours vary.

Admission is free; donations are appreciated. Guided tours of exhibitions and artist studios are available for groups of 10 or more. Located in Historic City Market in Raleigh at the corner of Blount and Davie streets. Artspace is supported by the North Carolina Arts Council; by the United Arts Council of Raleigh and Wake County; by the Raleigh Arts Commission; and by individual members, corporate donors; and private foundations.

For more information, please visit [www.artspacenc.org](http://www.artspacenc.org)



## through the doubt Dawn Gettler

2011 Summer Artist-in-Residence

Residency: June 28–August 4, 2011  
Exhibition: August 5–September 3, 2011  
Gallery 1

# through the doubt

## Dawn Gettler

Chicago-based artist Dawn Gettler was selected as Artspace's 2011 Summer Artist-in-Residence from a competitive pool of applicants. The residency program provides established artists with a brief studio opportunity in Artspace's Gallery One. The open-to-the-public setting allows the community to engage with the artist during the month-long residency, while the artist creates work in preparation for a solo exhibition immediately following the residency period.

In 2009, Dawn Gettler was awarded a prestigious residency at the Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts, in Omaha, NE. This marked the first time Gettler made artwork outside of an academic setting since earning her MFA in printmaking from Ohio University in 2006. Making work solely for herself allowed Gettler to refocus both her practice and concept. It was while completing her first residency that Gettler notes her installations, though still centered around personal narratives, "became more romantic" and less skeptical. In part, this is due to the very nature of artist residencies, affording individuals time and space to simply make art. These concepts continue to play a critical role in Gettler's work, evident in her solo exhibition, *through the doubt*. The exhibition is comprised of four works, three of which were produced during her residency at Artspace.

Like much of Gettler's recent works, the pieces presented in *through the doubt* visualize habits and rituals, and more specifically, explore how such actions foster consent or compliance, at times perhaps even feeding into unwarranted idealization. Every aspect of Gettler's process, including the selection of phrases, her chosen materials, the repetitive actions required to create hundreds of similar components, and the final documentation of the work, all align with these overarching concepts. For example, to create *jack and jill*, a pair of oversized, illuminated, paper chandelier forms, Gettler was informed by two well-known phrases from the nursery rhyme of the same name: "jack fell down" and "jill came tumbling after." Gettler typed the two phrases repeatedly on 1,033 pieces of receipt paper, before dipping the lower portion of each receipt into glycerin (soap). For *jack*, she used a dark, gray-brown hue, perhaps representative of dirt and grime as he "fell down," while she selected a milky white soap for the counterpoint, to represent the pure naivety she associates with Jill, who blindly followed Jack's misstep.

As in *jack and jill*, the phrases Gettler incorporates into her work often highlight how language, particularly habitual, call-and-response dialogue specifically related to relationships, can be an indicator of compliance. Performing each mundane task necessary to complete the work (cutting the paper strips, typing the phrases, dipping the papers into soap, punching holes, attaching each piece of paper to monofilament, etc.) 2066 times acknowledges the artist's own role in perpetuating the very ideas she critiques.

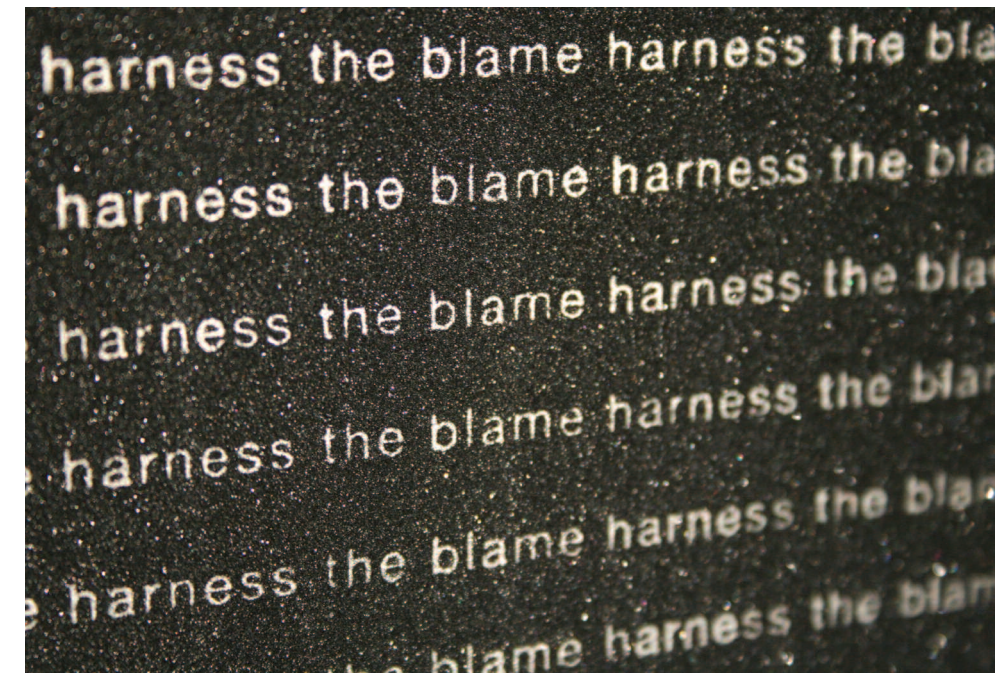
Gettler is very deliberate in her choice of materials, again considering the overall concept behind each work when making such decisions. While she almost always makes pieces that appear "pretty" on the surface, adhering to a clean aesthetic, her choice to use sugar, for example in a work such as *the letter*, was critical to her concept, which is often dark or skeptical.

Gettler printed pieces of paper with various ways of telling someone to "shut up," and then cut the text and cast it in sugar. The cast sugar tiles were hung on the wall in rows, as though making up the sentences of a written letter. The sugar, though beautiful and slick at first glance, pointed to the false, sugar-coating of language. Gettler notes that she often tells people what they want to hear; it's a conditioned response. Due to the material in general, and specifically, the temperature to which Gettler heated the sugar, the tiles ultimately drooped off the wall, exposing the text over time. The implication is that just as these pieces were impermanent and unstable, so too are artificial relationships.

While recent works *the cowardly lion* and *promise what you will* also present beautiful, shimmering surfaces, there is once again evidence of an underlying cynicism coupled with fragility, due to the phrase and the materials used to delineate the text. The delicate surfaces were made by flocking carborundum or salt respectively onto the screenprinted phrases while the ink was still wet. Such phrases, repeated over and over again both in Gettler's head as she types or prints them and by the viewer maneuvering around her work, emphasize the notion that habits feed compliance. On the paper Gettler printed for the wall component of *the cowardly lion*, the text "harness the blame" gleams, yet is abrasive due to the grit of the carborundum (used to make sandpaper). These contrasting features seem to highlight two sides in opposition, with the text appearing as an instruction not to implicate others, reminding one to take control and recognize one's own moral responsibility. In *promise what you will*, the text "i thought i would find you here" was screenprinted on 800 sheets of vellum and flocked with pickling salt. Rows of printed papers adorn clean, wooden armatures, forming a breezeway the viewer can walk through. The use of text coupled with a recurring "exhale" — a result of the systematic oscillation of electric fans that rustle the hanging papers — creates a space that appears to talk. Gettler views these built environments as dream-like spaces where "unrealistic notions can exist." Though the white-on-white papers used in *promise what you will* do provide an ethereal calmness, the recurring phrase, as a representation of the artist's inner thoughts, in contrast, psychologically charges the space. Is the tone of the phrase condescending? Accusatory? Or is it one of relief? Gettler's choice of pickling salt to coat the freshly printed words may denote bitterness or disapproval, while at the same time depicting the desire to preserve or maintain the status. The fragile nature of the flocked salt once again reflects transience. Over the period of the month-long exhibition, the salt will fall off the paper (due to the fans) and accumulate on the floor. As the text vanishes — the artist's original sentiment lost — Gettler once again emphasizes the ambiguity of words and their meaning, and the ability for feelings to evolve, and in this case, to disintegrate.

There are simple, mundane actions required to create the multiples that comprise Gettler's installations, such as typing or screenprinting the same phrase more than 1000 times. However, when made in the name of art, these actions are elevated from tasks to habits and ultimately, to rituals, due to the symbolic and emotional meanings Gettler attributes to the acts. Her actions depict how repetition can foster acquiescence; her dedication to the tasks are visualized through the creation of monumental, interactive spaces.

The evolution of a habit into a ritual is furthered by Gettler's extensive documentation of her process. Gettler takes numerous photographs, capturing each stage of the installation. Once the works are de-installed, these images are often all that remain of her temporary, site-specific installations. The photos become the artwork, and interestingly, many feature the artist, illuminating the significance of her hand in the development of the work. These photographs are carefully composed, with Gettler considering the camera angles, her position within the frame, her attire, the lighting, the tone communicated, etc. More recently, Gettler has been composing short



Dawn Gettler, *the cowardly lion* (detail), silver paper flocked in carborundum

time-lapse videos, using the rhythmic, predictable action shots taken from the de-installation of her pieces. In the past, these videos were primarily viewed as part of the process only. Upon her arrival at Artspace however, Dawn hung sewn paper on a wooden armature, similar to part of the breezeway in *promise what you will* as a backdrop for projecting one of her time-lapse works. While Dawn once considered these short videos only as documentation of her "real" work, these performative pieces — both the beautiful videos, along with her series of photographs — also function as individual works of art. One such example from a previous installation, *the letter*, is a well-composed, beautiful photograph of the artist mid-process. Gettler stands poised atop two open ladders. Visible from the waist down, horizontal lines are replicated in the photograph in the stripes on Gettler's dress, the horizontal board she stands on, and the lines created on the walls by the tiles. The shape of her A-line dress is repeated again in the position of her legs and in the A-frames of the ladders. Her left foot is gracefully pointed, like a dancer, as she stretches to hang the next tile. It is through such photographs that we witness Gettler as the primary mechanism behind her installations, yet the stills and videos are void of challenges, fatigue, and exhaustion. For friends and family members at home and from past residencies, this series, perhaps more than the final installations, illuminates Gettler's personal narrative, specifically the last two and a half years that have been spent at residencies, as she wants it to be remembered and communicated. The photographs and videos present an idealized view of the many necessary steps to produce hundreds or thousands of multiples for her installations, once again, conceptually exploring difficult concepts disguised by a beautiful aesthetic.

Dawn Gettler's exhibition, *through the doubt*, presents four new installations, three of which were created at Artspace during her month-long residency in July 2011. Her dream-like installations are based on a personal narrative, and involve numerous process steps, repeated hundreds, sometimes thousands of times. Using printing and sewing techniques on paper, along with many non-traditional materials including soap, sugar, and salt, Gettler's work is an exploration of how habits and rituals feed conformity or compliance. While primarily considering male-female relationships, her work overall questions learned behaviors. Her process is aimed at understanding truth, with her final works presenting a contemplative space for the viewer.