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### Lauren Hom: Design Pioneer

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CDE 504 – Design Pioneers

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### Lauren Hom: Design Pioneer

Self-made hand lettering artist Lauren Hom is living the American Dream – doing what she loves, having fun, and getting paid to do it all. Based in Detroit, Hom has created quite the following on social media as a playful, whimsical artist who doesn't take life too seriously. She turns her life's hardships, friends' jokes, and weird ideas into art all while not giving a damn what other people think of it. Her journey to where she is now is an inspiration to all aspiring artists.

#### **Early Life, Education, and Early Career**

Born and raised in a small town in Southern California outside of Los Angeles, Hom was always creating art. Ever since grade school Hom was obsessed with letters. Other students would “ooh and ahh” over her beautiful handwriting and request that she write their name or doodle on their notebooks. Not only was Hom surrounded with art at a young age, but she was also surrounded by food. Her family loved to cook, and she admired food as being “aesthetically appealing with all the wild shapes and colorful ingredients” (Paget). She will later marry her two passions of art and cooking into her career.

At the age of 18, Hom moved to New York to attend the School of Visual Arts (SVA) where she majored in Creative Advertising (Dowden, 2020). Despite being passionate about the arts, like

many artists, Hom grew up hearing that she would never make a living as an artist. Thus, she pursued a marketable career in advertising that would promise a better chance at job security (Hom, 2020). As a requirement of her undergraduate studies at SVA, Hom took a Typography and Graphic Design class with Gail Anderson. It was during these classes that Hom realized that her passion of lettering could turn into something. Anderson noticed Hom's potential in the Graphic Design field and urged Hom to switch majors. Unfortunately, Hom believed that she had made it so far in her major that despite Anderson's suggestion, Hom decided to complete her degree in Advertising (Paget).

In 2012, her senior year of college, Hom started her first of many passion projects that was fueled by a late night of drinking with her friends. Hom created a blog called Daily Dishonesty on Tumblr (Figure 1, Figure 2, and Figure 3) that featured her hand lettering of silly white lies that she would say to herself on a daily basis. Daily Dishonesty provided Hom with a place to share her love of typography, humor, and illustration that she couldn't do through her advertising



Samples from the Daily Dishonesty Tumblr & Book:

*Figure 1* (left): “I’ll be there in 5 minutes” focuses on a strong contrast in hierarchy using scale and color. The text is written in a sans serif bordering a bold, red numeral “5”.

*Figure 2* (middle): “Calories don’t count on the weekend” uses a whimsical combination of cursive and serif fonts in a vibrant red surrounded by a confetti of multi-color “sprinkles” make this piece appear like a tasty cupcake.

*Figure 3* (right): “No, I’m not crying there’s just something in my eye” uses a simple type lock-up marrying sans-serif and script lettering focusing on the bold color choice of yellow and teal to create an eye catching design to draw your eye to the lettering.

work. Examples of some of the white lies she hand lettered were things like: “Calories don’t count on the weekend.”, “I’ll be there in 5 minutes.”, “No, I’m not crying there’s just something in my eye.”. It was only a matter of time before Hom’s Daily Dishonesty picked up a lot of attention and she quickly got to 50,000 followers and was soon contacted by a literary agent to publish her work from Daily Dishonesty (Paget). What started out as a “silly” hand-lettering project ended up turning into Hom’s first big break. It was at this time that Hom was getting ready to graduate top of her class all while signing her first book deal for Daily Dishonesty!

After graduation and signing her book deal, Hom was on to her first job at Battern, Barton, Durstine, & Osborne (BBDO), one of the world’s most awarded advertising agency in New York City. She was hired as a junior art director, what she believed to be her dream job. BBDO’s motto of “The Work. The Work. The Work.” rang true as Hom spent many hours and nights working on her projects. And after nine months, Hom was miserable – tired, depressed, burnt out, you name it, she was it. Hom was tired of the 9 to 5 and longing for something better. While working at the agency, Hom was still pursuing freelance work on the side. With the realization that she was enjoying her freelance work more than her job at BBDO, she decided to calculate her hours and she figured out that based on her salary at the agency she was only making \$20 per hour compared to the \$75 per hour she was charging for her freelance work (Dowden, 2020). And with that new knowledge, Hom decided that she wanted to leave her job to pursue her freelance career.

### **Transitioning to Full-Time Freelance and Career Today**

Before leaving her steady paying job, Hom knew that she needed to set a solid foundation as a freelance artist. She started off by picking up any creative gig she could find on Craigslist. While she was completing more freelance work, she started to shift her website portfolio from her

advertising work to her lettering work from Daily Dishonesty and other self-initiated projects.

Finally, Hom reached out to illustration agents by e-mailing her elevator pitch and samples of her work. After e-mailing over 25 agents, she only heard back from three to four, and she ultimately signed with an agent named Reach, now known as Satellite (Paget). Once she was signed on with her agent and her freelance work picked up, she was able to leave her 9 to 5 and start freelancing full time.

On top of her freelance work, Hom also got into the world of painting murals, creating chalkboard menus, and teaching. The story of how she got into these things all stem from her mantra “Work hard, Snack Often” (Figure 4). According to Hom, this means to “work harder and smarter than everyone else, but always give in to your cravings for a creative snack. Always. We all know that diets suck anyways.” Hom also refers to her creative snacks as her passion projects. Hom’s passion projects typically stem from a night of drinking or a spark of an idea that she later shares with her friends to see if it’s totally weird or something that she should do. One of

her passion projects led her to the avenue of teaching (and ultimately murals too) – and that was chalkboard menus. Hom loves food and she wanted to eventually create a cookbook but her agent told her that she isn’t know for food and cooking so she couldn’t get the book to sell. Spark



*Figure 4.* A mural in Hom’s studio space painted in 2019 featuring her motto “Work Hard Snack Often”. Combining her love of lettering and food, this mural uses values of blue and pink pastels with a cursive type lock-up appearing as noodles coming out of a bowl surrounded by other delectable food items.

the aha-moment: Hom needed to build up her food lettering presence. She decided to create a flyer to hand out to restaurants to advertise her lettering expertise. She would hand letter their chalkboard sign in exchange for whatever food item she was lettering. And it worked! Hom was getting clients from various restaurants getting her the exposure and practice in chalkboard lettering, all while getting to enjoy delicious food doing what she loves. One day she took this flyer to a local food truck event and unknowingly gave a flyer to the CEO of Skillshare who happened to be running a food truck. The CEO was intrigued by her work and reached out to Hom to ask her to run a Skillshare class on chalkboard lettering (Hom, 2020). Hom immediately took the opportunity and filmed the course. This ultimately sparked Hom's desire to share her passion through teaching not only on Skillshare, but on her website, homsweethom.com, where she shared her "Toolbox" (her list of tools she uses to create, basic lettering techniques, tips and tricks for tackling hard letters, etc.) and her "Homework" (weekly challenges to give people a creative prompt to help them come up with ideas for what to letter other than just song lyrics and motivational quotes). With these pages, Hom is able to reach a broad audience not only to showcase her work but also teach future letters how to get started.

### **Notable Creative Snacks**

#### *Ex-Boyfriend Tears*

As mentioned earlier, her first creative snack was Daily Dishonesty. Not only did this "snack" get her to where she is today, but it ultimately showed Hom that by giving in to her passions that she can get a job from it. This encouraged Hom to take on whatever idea came into her head despite what other people might think about it. If she thought it was funny, then it was worth doing.

After Daily Dishonesty, her next passion project came from a bad breakup with her boyfriend while still working at the design agency. On a whim, she grabbed a post-it note, wrote “ex-boyfriend tears”, stuck it on her water bottle, and started drinking from it. She received multiple comments from her coworkers that it was so funny, and she realized that other people were relating to it, so it could potentially be her next project (Hom, 2020). She went home, went onto Illustrator, and created a flask design featuring her hand lettering of “ex boyfriend tears” (Figure 5). She shared the new creation with her Daily Dishonesty followers since it matched the humor and within 3 hours she had 12,000 likes. She went back into the history and saw that the author John Greene was following Daily Dishonesty and re-blogged it to his Tumblr, ultimately helping her to sell \$10,000 of ex-boyfriend tears (Hom, 2020). After completing this project, Hom noticed something. There seemed to be a pattern: something happens, she made a project based off it, people shared it, and it led to something big (more clients, money, etc.). This realization encouraged Hom to welcome her random ideas with open arms as she never knew what else they might lead her to.



*Figure 5.* A photograph of flasks etched with the “ex-boyfriend tears” cursive lettering with extended swashes.



### *Flour Crowns*

Hom always returns to the theme of food, and who wouldn't? A few of her notable passion projects stemmed from her love of food and her interest in creating a cookbook. But, her first food project had nothing to do with lettering, it was just a funny pun that Hom thought of one day, Flour Crowns. Flour Crowns,

challenged Hom to create wearable crowns out of some of her favorite carby treats (Figure 7, Figure 8, Figure 9). She spent a day at her grandma's house creating the crowns and having a photoshoot wearing them. She slowly trickled out photos from the shoot to her Instagram in between



*Figure 6.* Photograph taken by Hom's brother of her taking photos of her flour crowns in her grandmothers alley way surrounded by recyclables and trash!

posting lettering work. Her brother took a behind-the-scenes photo (Figure 6), which initially Hom was ashamed of but soon she realized it was a moment to share with her followers proving that you don't need fancy equipment to do what she does. While not everyone was on board with her new passion project, Hom expressed that she didn't care. She equated losing followers to the



*Figure 7, Figure 8, and Figure 9.* Samples from Hom's passion project titled Flour Crowns. Each crown is made from various pastry items such as ice cream cones, cookies, etc. that were meticulously arranged by Hom to create an ornate crown. Hom modeled each crown adorned on her head wearing various vibrant and bold dress in front of a solid color background.



unwanted item in your trail mix snack (for her it's the raisins), if they don't like what she is doing, she doesn't want them to be there anyways. And if they didn't like Flour Crowns, they certainly weren't going to like what she did next.

### *Peen Cuisine*

Nothing is off the table when it comes to her passion projects and the next one stemmed from a comment on her Instagram post of her chalkboard murals that said, "Foods before Dudes". The comment said, "cuisine before peen", and Hom lost it. She thought it was funniest comment and she knew she had to do something with it. Thus, Peen Cuisine was born. Peen Cuisine is a cooking blog that features vegetarian recipes all packaged up in delectable "peen" shapes along with witty, "peen" focused names. For example, on the blog you find recipes for "Cockamole & Chips" (Figure 11), "Miso Corny", "Peenapple Fried Rice", and "Blueberry Peencakes" (Figure 12). While this is another project that doesn't feature much hand-lettering, other than the logo and some quotes, it showcases Hom's ability to have fun and make a creative project out of something that happened in her life. While Hom enjoys a good humorous passion project, she also has done some notable work for serious clients.

*Peen Cuisine*

Figure 10. Peen Cuisine logo utilizes bold, blush pink, cursive lettering.



Figure 11. Cockamole & Chips recipe photograph of a guacamole dip surrounded by peen shaped chips.

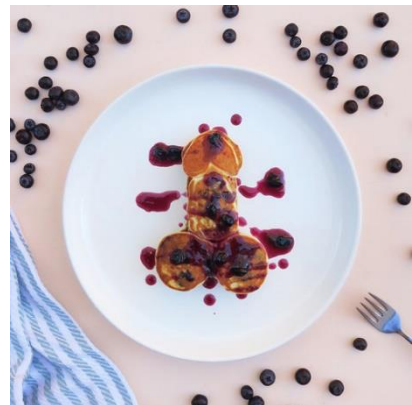


Figure 12. Blueberry Peencakes recipe photograph of a scrumptious peen-shaped blueberry pancake with a drizzle of blueberry syrup.

### *Prudential Mural*

In 2018, Hom designed a 13' by 30' mural for the Pennsylvania Conference for Women sponsored by Prudential (Figure 13). The design was printed on large sheets of fabric and displayed as a mural in the conference alongside three other murals. Hom's mural almost became an interactive piece as attendees were walking through the installation to get to other parts of the venue. Hom used a bold color palette of blues, pinks, and yellows along with a combination of lettering and illustrations to communicate positive phrases such as "Make it Happen", "Goal Digger", "Be my own Boss" to encourage young women to be powerful, strong leaders. This mural is not only inspiration to women, but all the phrases can be used to describe Hom. She became her own boss at a young age, she is continuing to learn as she shares on her website that she is going back to culinary school, and she's not afraid to share her "genius" as she is willing to share her process, her work, and her humor with her followers.



*Figure 13.* Prudential Mural, 13' by 30', 2018. An inspirational mural featuring several positive, empowering words and phrases. This bold mural uses a combination of various lettering styles and imagery of stars and a hand holding a light bulb on a dark navy background with pops of white, blue, purple, and yellow. The dynamic placement of the text encourages the eye to travel throughout the entire mural and keeps the viewer engaged in the work.

### *Googleplex Mural*

In 2020, Hom was asked to paint a mural for Google at their VR offices in San Francisco, California (Figure 14). Hom hand lettered the phrase “We’re Going Places” in a bright, playful, but sophisticated cursive style. Hom states that she wanted to explore the duality of the meaning of the phrase by bringing hopeful feelings through her choice of bright colors. Surrounding the words are abstract coral-shaped doodles that were meant to create a sense of movement on the wall representing the motion of moving forward with something (Dowden). While the flow of the coral-shaped marks seems to be going in a strange direction, I believe that it serves as a “looping”



*Figure 14 (right).* Googleplex Mural, 12' by 16', 2020. A bold, vibrant hand-painted mural that features a simple cursive lock-up surrounded by abstract coral-shapes using an intense 80's style color palette of bright pinks, electric blues, and a pastel yellow.

effect that directs the viewers eye back up to the phrase “We’re going places” encouraging you to read the phrase over and over again. When looking at her mural and considering her artist statement on her work, I am left with the understanding that the future is an abstract thought — you never know what it is going to hold, but we can hope that it will be as bright and bold as the colors Hom chose for the mural.

### *BUSH's Chili Beans*

Aside from passion projects and murals, Hom has also done advertising work for some notable clients such as Starbucks, Target, Hallmark, TIME, Adobe, YouTube, and more. In a recent project for BUSH's chili beans, Hom combined her love of food and hand-lettering to create

three mouthwatering designs. The designs feature three different uplifting phrases while using bold, festive colors to showcase meals that you could create using various BUSH's chili beans (Figure 15). These designs showcase Hom's ability to create hand-lettering out of just about anything.

#### *Winsor & Newton Advertisements*

In another advertising project, Winsor & Newton asked Hom to create a piece using their gouache, watercolor paper, and pencils (Figure 16). Brilliantly, they documented her process from sketches to final product to showcase her using each of these tools as a fundamental piece of creating. The final product was a beautiful type lock up featuring a quote by Michael Pollan flourished in vibrant vegetation and foliage.

While these are just some of Hom's notable projects her message through her work and personal story is clear - let your passion projects fuel your creativity and that you never know who is looking at your work nor who will share it – so put yourself out there!

*Figure 16.* Gouache painting for Winsor & Newton using cool greens with pops of orange and red, featuring cursive lettering with flourishes of leaves, vegetables, and fruits coming off of the beginning and ending swashes of the letters.



*Figure 15.* Sample for BUSH's chili bean social media advertisement that showcases Hom's ability to letter in just about anything. Hom letters the phrase "Spice Things Up!" in a bowl of cheese queso using a red sauce surrounded by slices of jalapeno peppers and beans. The piece is then photographed surrounded by the products used in the bowl: Hom's hand is seen holding a jalapeno next to cheese, chips, cilantro, peppers, and a can of the BUSH's chili beans in the bottom right corner.





## Words of Wisdom

As an educator, Hom has taken it upon herself not only to teach her craft but to share her tips and tricks in hopes of helping other aspiring artists achieve their goals in their careers. In Hom like fashion, she uses teaching as an opportunity to create another passion project titled *Ten Things Beyonce Taught Me About Being a Bosslady Freelancer*. We will look at some of the stand outs from this collection. First and foremost, “it’s the glimpse of light that makes a diamond really shine” (Figure 17), to Hom that means you can be “one gem of a designer, but if you are always in the dark you will never sparkle” so get yourself out there! The light won’t magically find you, *you* have to put in the effort to find *it*. People will not magically find your website, you need to actively post your work and get it onto various platforms. The second Beyonce quote that Hom references is “it’s the soul that needs the surgery” (Figure 18) – meaning that you need to make sure that your work has heart to it and that it’s not just another pretty design. To Hom, “great designs are the intersection of an awesome idea and awesome execution” so make sure that *your* work has some soul to it in addition to being a pretty face. The third and final Beyonce quote that I will reference from Hom’s list is “I come with a side of trouble, but I know that’s why you’re

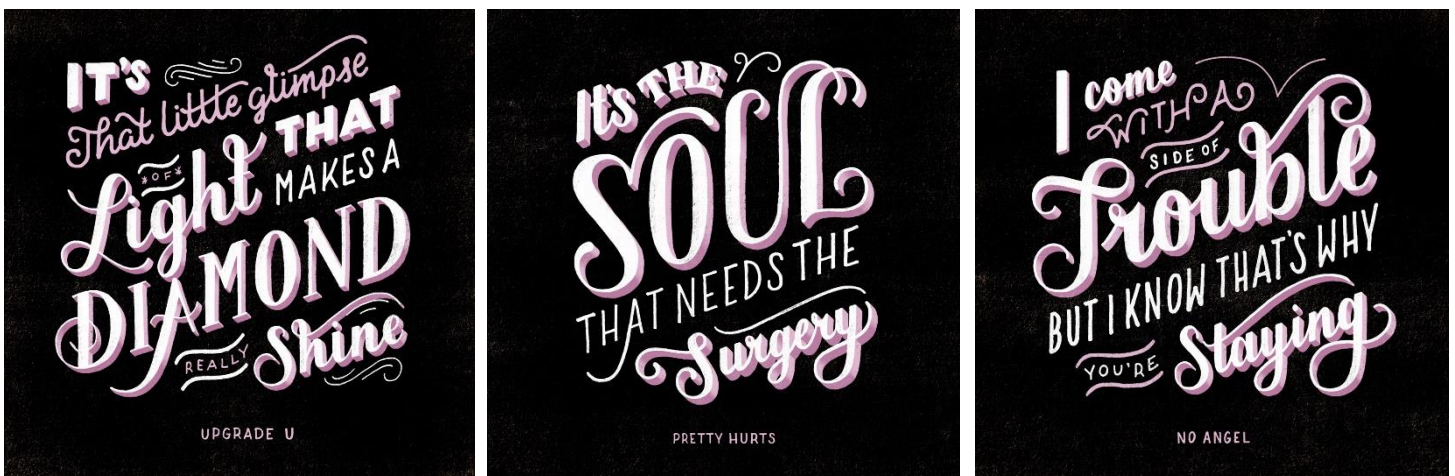


Figure 17, Figure 18, Figure 19. Samples from “Ten Things Beyonce Taught Me About Being a Bosslady Designer” that all utilize a type lock-up with a combination of sans serif and script white lettering with a pale pink drop shadow on a black background.

staying” (Figure 19) – meaning that it’s okay to be a little weird and show your true self. You will attract the people who like you for who you are - don’t be afraid to push the boundaries in fear of being rejected. You won’t be everyone’s cup of tea and that’s okay.

Aside from pulling Beyonce lyrics to inspire future designers, Hom shares some discoveries she’s made from her own journey. While her motto might be “work hard, snack often” she realized that working hard all of the time is not sustainable. Growing up, we are conditioned to believe that we need to work hard to be successful, and while that is true to a point, you need to find balance. Hom’s “secret sauce” solution was to learn to have fun and bring play into her work. By doing so it also made her realize that people enjoyed her work because they could relate to it. In return, they shared her work with their friends helping to circulate her work and get her more attention, alas, the lazy man’s marketing (Hom, 2020). She encourages designers to take themselves seriously, but to allow themselves to have fun in the process. She shares that “if it excites you or makes you laugh, it’s worth pursuing” so don’t let yourself get in the way of your own success. In the words of her father “you make your own luck”, be passionate about your work, put in the work, and watch the “luck” roll in (Hom, 2020).

### **A Lasting Impression**

Hom’s journey to where she is today is a valuable life lesson to everyone, not just designers. With a little will, strategy, hard work, and lots of play, you can make your day job your dream job. Hom shares that all creatives “have to make sure that you’re keeping a watch on your own creative tank because if you’re not careful, your creative tank will drain pretty quickly and then you’re burnt out.” She goes on to say that “burnout isn’t just like a number of hours your working, it’s how you feel about that you’re doing...” (Clouse, 49:11). Her playful work brings her joy and is the driving force behind her being able to sustain her business. If you can



remember being a child or can take a moment to watch your own children, you'll see the importance of play and its direct correlation to their happiness. This is what Hom has discovered through her passion projects, she's re-discovered her childhood when the living was easy, you didn't feel judged, and you just did what made you happy. In our modern hustle and bustle world, we've lost that fundamental piece of having fun and Hom is sharing with the world one peen-shaped food or flour crown at a time to help us rediscover our inner child to find happiness. Not only has Hom brought to light this important realization of bringing play into your everyday life and work, but she's shown the importance of the arts towards our well-being.

Hom is a leader in showing how the arts are a fundamental part of our everyday life. She showcases it as a means of self-healing, demonstrated in her ex-boyfriend's tears project. Through her murals for Prudential and Google, she showcases art as a way to inspire. And ultimately, she shows how art can be used to have fun, let go, and enjoy life as seen in her passion projects Flour Crowns and Peen Cuisine.

While it is good to encourage the fun of creating, her work does have some flaws when looked at with a closer eye. In her "it's the glimpse of light that makes a diamond really shine" Beyonce piece, the weight of the "A" and "M" is on the wrong side of the letterform, it should have the thicker weight on the down stroke which would be on the right side of the letterform. But as I'm sure Hom would agree, we aren't all perfect and each mistake or hiccup in life allows for an opportunity to learn and grow.

Hom is a true inspiration to all young and aspiring designers. She openly and willingly shares her story about how she got to where she is today in hopes of making the world of designers a happier place. She is not afraid of sharing her "secret sauce" of learning to play and have fun with your work to help designers (and people) everywhere to take life a little less seriously. So

go make some peen-shaped foods, crowns out of your favorite pastries, or whatever weird thing that comes to mind. Let's go learn to play again.

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