

**LAUREN EVE CANTOR**  
**ARTIST STATEMENT**  
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**WHO I AM**

*"[A designer] must have a predisposition for inquiry and curiosity." - Susan S. Szenasy*

I have always been interested in puzzles, not games or crossword puzzles, but the simple questions of life. Yes, I was that annoying child who continually asked "why?" I have struggled over the years to discover what my true passion in life is, and now, I finally have discerned that my passion is for knowledge, the quest to understand and to know, and to take this knowledge, study it and then encapsulate it, communicate it.

I have always thought of myself as a left-brain person: logical, analytical, forthright, organized and often obsessive. I have learned that I am a risk taker - I enjoy solving complex problems, changing my environment and immersing myself in new experiences.

I chose to study Astrophysics in college mostly because it was a subject I knew nothing about, and I could study an object that someone had never looked at before me. I was intrigued by the fact that the science (and our universe) continued to change every day with new discoveries that were aided by ever advancing technologies, but might take eons to prove. I was blown away by learning 4th dimensional calculus - what could be more outside of the box of the human experience? Who studies Astrophysics in New York City, where you can't see even the most common of constellations due to light pollution? Yet I learned something new and magical; I sat on the steps of the college with a telescope and explained a lunar eclipse to both mystified children and bored adults; I visited the deserts of Chile to codify a dying star, and I was amazed by seeing the rings of Saturn with my own eyes (shockingly it looked like a child's illustration.)

I however spent all of my summers in college immersing myself in volunteer work in Latin America. I wanted to solve the puzzle of my materiality - could I live without running water and electricity? Could I have an impact on a community? Did I have something to teach about modern living? My brain exploded once I realized I was having dreams in another language. While I had much to teach, I had so much more to learn. I saw my own limitations and my unique place in this world - far more than I could ever impart upon the communities I lived with. Logic taught me that time was paramount, that schedules were necessary, and that building by the blueprints was important, but the experience taught me that listening and observing (just being present) were key to a relationship. That by just attempting to communicate and share brought respect and friendship.

I wanted to leave college and teach science and math to high school students, but I was thwarted by the reality that even in the 1990s, private schools didn't think a young girl was an appropriate role model to teach these subjects. I fell into Wall Street because of my language skills, and realized that there was another side of NYC I had never discovered. I went to business school because I was intrigued by finance but I had never been exposed to the math and science behind finance. Again, I was drawn to the complex models, and I began my career in trading. I chose to distill the most complex of financial structures into models and then into metaphors - my skill was for translating these packages into simple language for my clients and my colleagues. I was hired to different positions because not only did I understand the complexity of the instruments, I could explain them in terms that others could comprehend.

I ended up rebuilding trading models to make the systems more accurate, more approachable, and often more attractive. I created spreadsheets to visualize strategies and real-time profit & loss statements. I rebuilt business infrastructures and created management systems to effectively manage my team and the markets in such a fast-paced environment. I thrived in an environment of non-stop information flow, because it fulfilled my thirst for knowledge. Before I knew what infographics were, I was using "big data" to create visual representations of my trading strategies and the market's impact in order to discuss my ideas with my team. I educated my peers and my bosses, and I loved the idea of what I did. I was using my creativity and risk taking abilities to design for finance, although I hadn't put a name to the discipline.

After 2008 and the rise of the resentment toward Wall Street and its antics, I realized that there was something about my work that left me unfulfilled - I was in a quest for knowledge while those around me were often solely on a quest for money. Although I was making my life better, I wasn't having an impact on humanity or my community. Then after living through a painful company bankruptcy, I decided to make a radical change. To quote Moby, "I left New York for Los Angeles because creativity requires the freedom to fail." I wasn't sure who I was, what my life's passion should be,

but I wanted the freedom to find out.

#### WHAT I DO

*“To design is much more than simply to assemble, to order, or even to edit: it is to add value and meaning, to illuminate, to simplify, to clarify, to modify, to dignify, to dramatize, to persuade, and perhaps even to amuse. To design is to transform prose into poetry.” - Paul Rand*

I have always been attracted to Design, Color, and Architecture. I grew up in Miami Beach, and I was always fascinated by the light, the Ocean, and the curvature and texture of the Art Deco District. I love going to the movies, and I have always been drawn to the drama and storytelling (or the lack thereof) in the title sequences. I wasn't sure who I wanted to be when I grew up, but I wanted to use and explore the right side of my brain - the creative, the thoughtful, the intuitive.

I was compelled to take the next logical step: I decided to go back to school and immerse myself in Graphic Design. I have spent the past 18 months at UCLA getting a Certificate in Graphic Design. This was my first exposure to Design as a discipline, and it truly transformed my way of thinking, visualizing and experiencing the world around me.

At UCLA I have been exposed to a wide range of Design disciplines - design fundamentals, publications, textiles, packaging, design history, typography, drawing, entertainment, sustainability, web, user experience, mixed media, art and electronics, and photography. I have attempted to immerse myself in the Design world by attending conferences (TYPO, Tufte), listening to podcasts (Design Matters, Radio Lab, and 99% Invisible), following speakers (Creative Mornings), reading blogs (Maria Popova's Brain Pickings, The Fox is Black) and subscribing to magazines (IdN, Print, Communication Arts, Slanted).

Despite all of my classes and my attempt to immerse myself, I still want more. All of my student work solves the premise of the assignment, but the projects are for my own aesthetic - they look good and beautiful to me. My designs solve the problem of visual communication, but the problem is often of my own choosing. I still crave the impact of a third party - the community, the client - how my design affects the viewer. I want to solve a real life problem.

I believe I have accomplished all I can at UCLA, and that I need to work in a truly immersive environment surrounded by a team of inquisitive peers. I crave the intellectual discussion, the critique, the light bulb going off.

I would never describe myself as a fine artist, but as a visual problem solver or a visual communicator. To paraphrase Paul Rand, Design is a context for understanding. By studying design, I have learned the value of history, of inquiry, of context. I have discovered that my dreams are more colorful and dramatic - I have a new language for explaining the world around me.

My design sensibility is very studious and thoughtful. I still tend to be drawn to the mathematic and the logical, to organized geometry. I have been drawn to publication design with the layout and combination of typography and imagery. Just like learning a new language, I notice typography in the everyday, and think about composition and texture. What I am particularly fascinated by is Environmental Design - not only the way-finding, but the experience of the world around us and how we interact with it.

#### WHAT I WANT TO DO

*“Don't design something that just looks good. Design something that makes a statement.” - Bob Gill*

An MFA would allow me to accomplish three of my strategic life goals: i) I'd like to become an expert in Environmental Design, ii) I'd like to have a broader understanding, context and knowledge of Graphic Design in order to work on my writing and possibly work in design critique; and iii) I'd like to merge my skills in business and design and eventually build my own business and prosper as an entrepreneur/DEO.

With the advent of the smartphone and phablet, most of us roam the earth entranced by our small screen - we walk from place to place with headphones on, reading the feeds on our phones, and we forget the instinct to look around. Our brains are wired to desire not to miss anything that happens around us - which is why we look up when we hear a loud noise. With the world going global and socially networked, these desires have been filtered into the electronic - we must know what is happening everywhere, and as result, we often miss what is happening right in front of us.

I'd like to study the history, the context and the new innovations in Design in order to improve the user experience of

Environmental Design - whether that be a museum exhibit, an interactive experience, a digital magazine layout, or signs on a road. I think we all have something to learn if we stop, look up, and breathe.

I noticed recently while visiting several local Los Angeles museums, how exhibition design takes on different personalities depending on the exhibit and the audience. For instance, at an Impressionist exhibit at the LACMA, great care was taken in the choice of the wall colors and the placement of the text on the walls describing both the individual art and the context of the exhibit. However, although the LACMA had an iPhone app replacing a traditional audio tour, the audience was mainly baby boomers (without iPhones) and the type was relatively small, so the visitors had to be scolded by the security guards as they leaned in to read the text. ESMoA caters to a younger more progressive audience, and they chose not to put any text on the walls of the gallery at all for their recent Scratch experience. Visitors were guided by numbers on the floor which linked to a website as well as carefully placed iPads throughout the exhibit. The experience felt more personal more immersive. In between these experiences was a recent show at the Getty of a Jackson Pollock piece - one room was just the immense piece of artwork and the other room had both 2D and interactive explanations of the artist's method, process, paint choices, and description of the actual canvas frame. While each museum chose to focus on their core audience, each exhibit had a distinct feel and a progression of interactivity. I'd like to be able to learn the curatorial method and have a clear and distinct voice in creating such experiences.

I would also like to pursue an MFA, so that I could incorporate my (future) knowledge of design and my love of writing, and work at design critique. I find Debbie Millman's Design Observer podcasts to be inspiring, well researched, and entertaining. I'd love to follow in her footsteps in the art of teaching and spreading the word, and even creating publications to emulate this.

*"Part strategic business executive and part creative problem solver, the [Design Executive Officer] views an organization as a design project that requires both skill sets. They see themselves as catalysts for transformation; as agents of cultural change." - Maria Guidice*

Furthermore, I have a unique perspective on Design and how it can impact a client and a business, as I have spent close to 20 years working in the financial world, where companies and leaders would have benefited tremendously from a creative sensibility. Failure was not an option on Wall Street, which kept the status quo and often limited innovation. I believe that I again speak both languages - the language of Business and the language of Design. I would like to work (within) to design an organization that can support generations to come. I like to get my hands dirty, get into the muck, and work for a solution that will have both an aesthetic sensibility and a design benefit. I'd like to be a DEO for the next generation.

My passion is for Design - learning it, studying it, practicing it, and then using it to impact my community.