

# GINJA SWAGGER ([HTTP://RJS AAGER.COM/](http://rjsaager.com/))

LAUREN REINER



Lauren is the artist of “weeds and wonder” and self proclaimed healing and creativity facilitator, nature lover and mama. This interview took place in Lauren’s studio apartment which also doubles as the space for her art studio.

RENAE: WHERE DID THE NAME “WEEDS AND WONDER” COME FROM?

Lauren: I wanted to find a name that captured the idea of both, the struggles and delights that we experience as humans and in an introspective life. And maybe even, that those opposites can often be one in the same. A weed is something of power and potential and beauty unseen and something that people may not fully understand. For example, the dandelion. They are everywhere and most people use weed killer on them, they are thought to be a nuisance, but they have huge healing potential in every part of the plant. Its edible, you can use the root for a very healing tea. That was the idea, weeds as a wonder and wonder in the weeds that we experience.

This is very much what art is for me...a journey, an experience, a revealing of wonderful elements and challenges that test what I believe to be true.



**RENAE: DID YOU KNOW YOU WANTED TO START YOUR OWN BUSINESS WHEN YOU STARTED DOING ART AND GOING TO COLLEGE?**

Lauren: Oh god no...Yes.....Yes and oh god no. I've always been an artist. Meaning, that I started expressing myself visually at a young age and am an artist by nature because of the way I look at and experience life. Growing up my mom was a potter and went to art fairs and I would go with her to help sling her wares and help her glaze pieces, which I hated. I had a love/hate relationship with helping her. I loved traveling and the craft shows allowed that when I wouldn't have had much of an opportunity to do so. My dad was, and still, is a musician, so they were both very creative and running their own businesses. In undergrad I studied art but had a very definitive perspective of not wanting to make money making art...that it would take the joy out of it. I didn't want to be like my mom and churn out a ton of copies of things. What I love about art and making art is I can feel something, I can see something, I can process something, all my senses are affected and effected by the experience. I can then take that and process through a piece as opposed to having to make 25 whatever's. That is a reason I didn't want to go into art, the way I made it and the way I experienced money being made from art, were conflicting ideas to me.

I still pursued the arts though and went to a liberal arts school and studied fine art at Indiana University. Looking back, I'm not sure what my goal really was through my art studies. What I thought I wanted to be and do changed a lot. All I really knew was that art felt good and I was passionate about creating. I should have convinced my parents to help me go to art school but I didn't. I was convinced by the people around me that a liberal arts education was the way to go. They were telling me to do what I love but also to have a plan b, so I got mixed messages like you can do this, but...you also can't do this. It's kind of funny because in the end I got an art history minor which has REALLLLY helped me out.....(that's sarcasm) it has not helped me out at all. I got really frustrated with school and how little time I actually got to learn about art and art making. And there was absolutely no mention about how to BE and Artist in the real world.



Toward the end of my 4 years of college I started losing my drive and focus. I was studying with all these men. Men teachers, mostly studying with male students and they just want to call my art feminist. At the time this infuriated me...I was just a woman making art! I didn't want to be labeled...just seen and understood. I was just so mad at a lot of things. After graduation, I saved money went to Europe for a few years and really pushed myself away from art for a good 8 years or something. I ended up moving back and I knew I wanted to study something and after the first semester of a liberal arts grad school with not much of a direction I was like, "I AM AN ARTIST!" This vision of myself didn't turn into a business until years later and after a lot of focus on what tools I liked to use and time developing my style and eventually my 'brand.'

R: WHEN YOU WERE IN EUROPE DID YOU FEEL LIKE YOU KNEW THAT ALL? LIKE YOU WOULD RATHER BE DOING ART?

L: No.....I felt empty and sad. I felt sad. I don't think the whole time I was traveling I knew I wanted to be an artist but I did know there was something out there for me, somewhere. I looked for it in a lot of places. I thought maybe I was meant to write a cook book of recipes from my travels or write poetry or do some kind of import business. I thought maybe something in a nutrition coaching position or other health related field. I tried on a lot of hats, at least in my mind, and nothing felt good.

R: SO, WHEN YOU WENT TO GRAD SCHOOL WAS THAT WHEN YOU FELT LIKE YOU FOUND YOUR CALLING AS AN ARTIST?

L: Through my self-guided studies at Goddard College, I was able to realize where my heart was. It took me somehow getting interested energy healing, Reiki and Shamanic energetic healing specifically, which transitioned into more dream work which is when I intuitively started drawing again, recalling and recording my dreams. At that point I thought...Oh shit! I Should have been an art therapist but it was too late for that because I was almost done with grad school. But re-connecting with my art-self was the ultimate gem from my schooling...that and all the amazing friends I made and experiences I had. I am an artist. Even now though, I question myself like "are you really an artist Lauren? What does it take to be an artist?? All these voices in my head! There's a lot of doubt! Especially in something that you are pouring your heart into constantly and you are also wearing your heart on your sleeve and its exposed to criticism and people..... some ways that people think it is ok to interact with you is really appalling! You must thicken your skin and realize it comes down to you having to be happy with what you produce. It also takes a lot of saying "I am an Artist" at every opportunity.

R: WHAT DON'T PEOPLE SEE IN SOCIAL MEDIA WITH REGARDS TO YOUR ART? CRITICISM IS ONE THING.....

L: Yeah \*laughs\* I am impressed with how well I can let that stuff roll off my back. I had a night market experience where someone was just flipping through my stuff like it was covered in slime or something. It doesn't need to be your style but you don't walk by and stick your nose up! I don't love all art either but the point is there is a level of respect, especially when it comes to art, it is such a vulnerable profession.



Probably the discomfort that goes along with a very undefined career. I frequently stay up till 430 am working on projects. I feel nauseous most of the



day due to my irregular sleep schedule! I am a perfectionist, I much prefer hand cutting out circle tags instead of just square cutting them because I want them to match my style and brand. It isn't just cutting things out either. It is finding the right paper, cutting it out, sanding the edges. there is so much that goes in! There are so many steps that go into everything I do. Painting and actual art making is such a small part of being a working artist. I spend so much time updating my website, applying to shows, emailing about wholesale accounts etc. Another thing that is hard is I feel like I have something here that has a lot to say and how do I get that translated through the internet to people. People say, "oh you must love just sitting around painting and whatever..." I'm like yes.... I do love it. BUT. There is no start point, there is no stop point. So much of it is a feel and deciding, "This is as finished as I am going to get it!" even though I could probably work at it until I die! You have to balance it with how am I going to make money. If I want this to support me, it should be practical. I have to decide what I ask for help on, what I pay people to help me with or what do I decide to pass up.

Also, the life of an artist is very consuming and can at times be very lonely. So much of what we do is solitary. It can be a challenge balancing how much time and energy we give to our work and how much we are able to take care of ourselves and be in attentive, loving relationships with friends and family.

**R: WHAT DO YOU HOPE PEOPLE SEE OR FEEL WHEN THEY SEE YOUR ART? OR DO YOU WANT IT TO BE UNIQUE TO EACH PERSON?**

L: I was just thinking of this last night because I was thinking I should get my title tags ready, but I really don't like titling my pieces. Yes, I have a vision and feel for what is happening in a piece, but I also want to leave that up for interpretation because what I am expressing isn't the whole vision. I really like to leave a lot open to other's imaginations and, once I release it to the world, it isn't important what I think, it is only important what YOU think about it. Art is about what you feel when you experience it. For this reason, I've been giving my work pretty vague titles like, 'and' or 'in the.'

R: WHAT DO YOU DO TO RECHARGE OR WHEN YOU ARE NOT MOTIVATED?

L: It depends what kind of tired I am and if I have a deadline. Right now, I have a deadline coming up so even if I am exhausted I have to get a lot done each day to meet that deadline. What I tend to do when I get like that is do more prep work, simple things like gluing paper onto things, sanding, or anything that doesn't require brain power, step-by-step things that have a beginning, middle and end. I also think it's important to not judge yourself. I am not working out as much as I would like to and if I let go of some of that criticism I feel a little more recuperated. I think it is really important to move your body. Go for a short walk or run or...Zumba or whatever your thing is! We get too much into our heads and must move our consciousness into our body. When I get too heady I can't make art.



R: I THINK IT IS IMPORTANT TO POINT OUT THAT YOU ARE A SINGLE MOTHER, YOU LIVE IN A STUDIO APARTMENT AND OFTEN HAVE A 6-YEAR-OLD RUNNING AROUND HERE, WHILE DOING ART... THAT'S THE REAL PICTURE!



L: YEAH!! Let's get into the inspiring part..haha! One thing people really don't see in social media is Henry, my son. My art studio is my living studio, so no bedroom, I have enough art supplies to fill a large art space and I have a 6-year-old who lives with me and all his Star Wars toys and he needs space to be and be comfortable and I need space to make art so that can be tricky. I think I do a really good job of balancing space. Right now, he is out of school for the summer and even when he's not, he's jumping on top of me while I'm

cutting things and he just needs a lot of attention. I do my best to give that to him but it is just a huge balancing act not just with making art but where is the money coming from and how am I taking care of myself and my son and maintain a good relationship with my ex so that we can have smooth transitions with our son. It is just a lot. Sometimes I don't even have to stay up until 4 in the morning to be exhausted, I just go through a day.

R: WHAT KEEPS YOU MOTIVATED?

L: I have stopped and restarted a lot in my life and the more I do that, and the older I get, the more it physically hurts. I have so much working through me, we all do, it's just how much are we acknowledging. For me it is about visuals. I have to get it out or else I get really depressed, art is my biggest anti-depressant. I may be tired, but I am not sad!! Even if I go a week without making art, I kind of start forgetting I am an artist. I must do something regularly to feel in touch with it, to feel like a human being with a purpose. Also...

Pinterest boards, connecting with art friends and soul friends, and really being aware and conscious of what turns me on and recording that in some way. Journaling, collaging, screen shots of social media or shapes and patterns in nature...whatever sets off a little flair for attention, I pay attention to and then process what about it inspires me.

**R: WHAT WOULD YOU SAY TO ANYONE TRYING TO FOLLOW THEIR PASSION- ART WISE-BUT MAY BE SCARED OF THE CRITICISM OR VULNERABILITY?**

**L:** Oh, there are a lot of things to worry about!! But worry will never get you anywhere you want to go. The bottom line for me is I **MUST** make to be alive. If you feel like you need to make something, if your hands start getting twitchy and just go with that! Then make baby steps. Write all your worries down, acknowledge them, then leave them! Focus on the approachable. We are so hard on ourselves. Set small goals and start where you are and with what you have. Be easy on yourself. My parents always told me that “time is going to pass any way...so what you want to do with that time is up to you.” I think about this a lot. And I take time to look backwards every now and then. Wow! Look how far I’ve come in the last few months...I’ve almost filled a notebook with sketches...I got one new wholesale order or taught myself a new skill. The little things you do add up. You will be amazed at how far you can go in a year...further than you think.



To see more of Lauren’s work and find out about her upcoming shows, follow her instagram @weeds\_and\_wonder or visit her site <http://www.weedsandwonder.com/> (<http://www.weedsandwonder.com/>) . She can also be contacted directly at [lauren@weedsandwonder.com](mailto:lauren@weedsandwonder.com)

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