

SPOTLIGHT

Every month, I feature an artist whose work and philosophy deserve to be in the spotlight.

In Conversation with Laurel Swenson

When did you first start painting?

I started painting basically as a child. I was always painting when I was a kid. Painting and drawing. So it was very early and then I got more into painting as a teenager. So I was always painting. One of my early gifts – I think I was probably around eight years old, nine years old and I had an Aunt who was a painter and she gifted me with some real paint brushes and some real tubes of paint and some canvass board, and that was – I think that was the beginning 'cause I was so excited to get those real art supplies as opposed to kid art supplies. So that was the very beginning.

Has painting always been your primary creative outlet?

No. I actually worked in video for about nine years. And it was actually my main art practice. I worked at experimental video art, they call it. And it was, I mean it was great. I mean I painted at the same time but painting definitely was not my primary focus. And it was great; I loved it. And the reason I ended up going back to painting was because the video work, like I loved it, but it required a lot of being in an editing suite or later on in front of a computer. It was very technology heavy. And I really wanted to get back to working with my hands and working with materials. So I went back to my love and started taking that more seriously.

What advice would you give to someone who was undecided about an artwork?

When somebody's interested in a piece of art work what I would ask myself is how do I feel when I stand in front of it? What emotions does it evoke and what is happening when I'm actually looking at it? Like am I drawn into it? Yeah, I think the feeling.

When you're working, silence or something else?

I mostly oscillate between silence and podcasts.

Any particular podcasts that you're really into right now?

Oh, so many. Right now I'm listening to a lot of pod casts that are aimed towards therapists because I am a therapist now. But in the past I've really loved This American Life. Dear Sugars is another one I that I absolutely love. So Good.

Artists name their paintings. How do you name yours?

That's a good question for me in particular because I really love the naming process. In fact it's one of my favourite parts. I mean I love the painting part of course. But when a painting is finished – I always name it after it's completed – and I will look at the painting and I will just kind of get a sense of it. Like what is this feeling? What is it saying energetically in a way? 'Cause I think that paintings - like the marks kind of like give a feeling usually. And I have a file full of title names that I gather as I'm going through the world. I just hear a little thing or I'll read a little snippet here and there and I will match a title to the painting. And usually, it's often related to something that's going on in my life at that time or something that was going on while I was painting that painting. So often it evokes a time in my life, you know. Because I feel in some ways often paintings really are almost like a journal of an artist's life. It's like documenting their life. And so the kind of titles that I use are usually one that is – like they evoke some other layer that adds a layer to the painting. So somebody can hear the title and see the painting and kind of marry those together and it has yet another meaning.