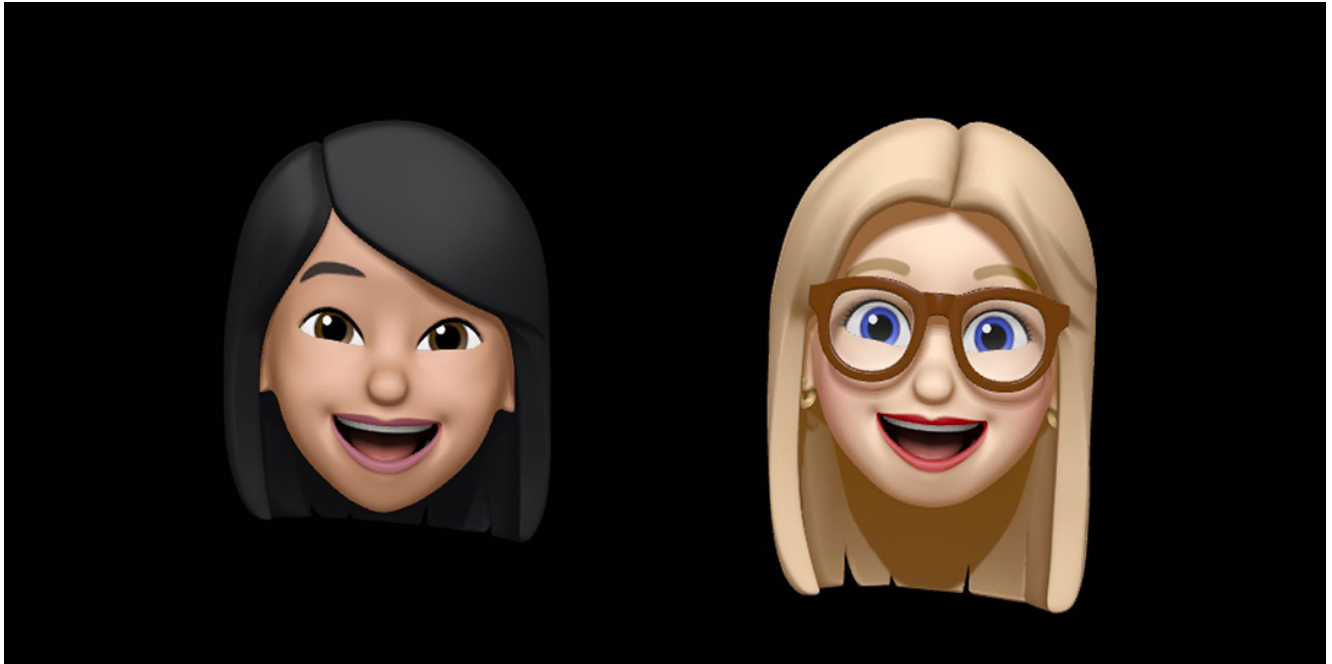


Interview with Lauren Wong and Gabby Lord, Founders of Super Keen



Talk about a match made in design heaven! Strategist Lauren Wong and designer Gabby Lord have joined forces to launch Super Keen, a New York-based studio named for their “intense enthusiasm to help folks launch ideas that create equitable, ecological futures for us all”. Female-founded and independently owned, we know Super Keen’s approach and outcomes will inspire our Shillington students, graduates and all creatives around the world.

Read on to learn more about why Lauren and Gabby teamed up, what’s on their studio and home bookshelves, practical advice for design students and who’s inspiring them at the moment. Some great shout-outs in this interview you won’t want to miss. Enjoy!

Congrats on the launch of Super Keen! You two seem like a powerhouse duo, how did you meet? What led to the decision to partner on a branding studio?

Gabby: Thanks Sara! We met at Character in 2019 where Lauren and I got to collaborate on a lot of projects together. We knew we worked well together but the thought of starting a studio together never really crossed our minds until a friend made a passing comment to me one night in a bar. They probably didn't give it another thought, but hearing them say that Lauren and I would make epic co-founders really stuck.

Months later, I told Lauren as a kind-of "haha, imagine..." and she was all in from that moment on. It almost scared me how much conviction she had! She called me the following day and said "Gabby, I know this is crazy, but I feel like we would be crazier NOT to do this."

Lauren: True. It felt crazy either way. But I kind of knew Gabby could see it, even though she mentioned it as a passing joke. And once I started imagining it, it just felt like we had to make this studio happen.

People talk a lot about the feeling of falling in love, where you can't get someone out of your head. I couldn't stop thinking about this partnership—and how fun it would be to work with Gabby all day, every day. The idea of creating something the way we wanted to... that was pretty exhilarating. And now we're doing it!

As a brand new biz, your website is (understandably) in-the-works. But could you each share a past project you're especially proud of, and why?

Lauren: One project holds a special place in our hearts, because we got to work so closely together. When we were both at a branding studio named Character, we got the opportunity to rebrand Conjure, a furniture rental company that used to be called Mobley.

Everything about that project connected to the positioning we built as a team. As a strategist, I'd walk into the kitchen

and hear designers argue about whether the art direction is really doing the strategy justice. Being in sync about the strategy made everything connect together: the naming, the verbal, the visual, the website, the photoshoots. And when Conjure finally relaunched, it felt incredibly exciting and cohesive—a world you wanted to jump into.

See the full Conjure rebrand.



Image credit: character.co



Image credit: character.co



Image credit: character.co

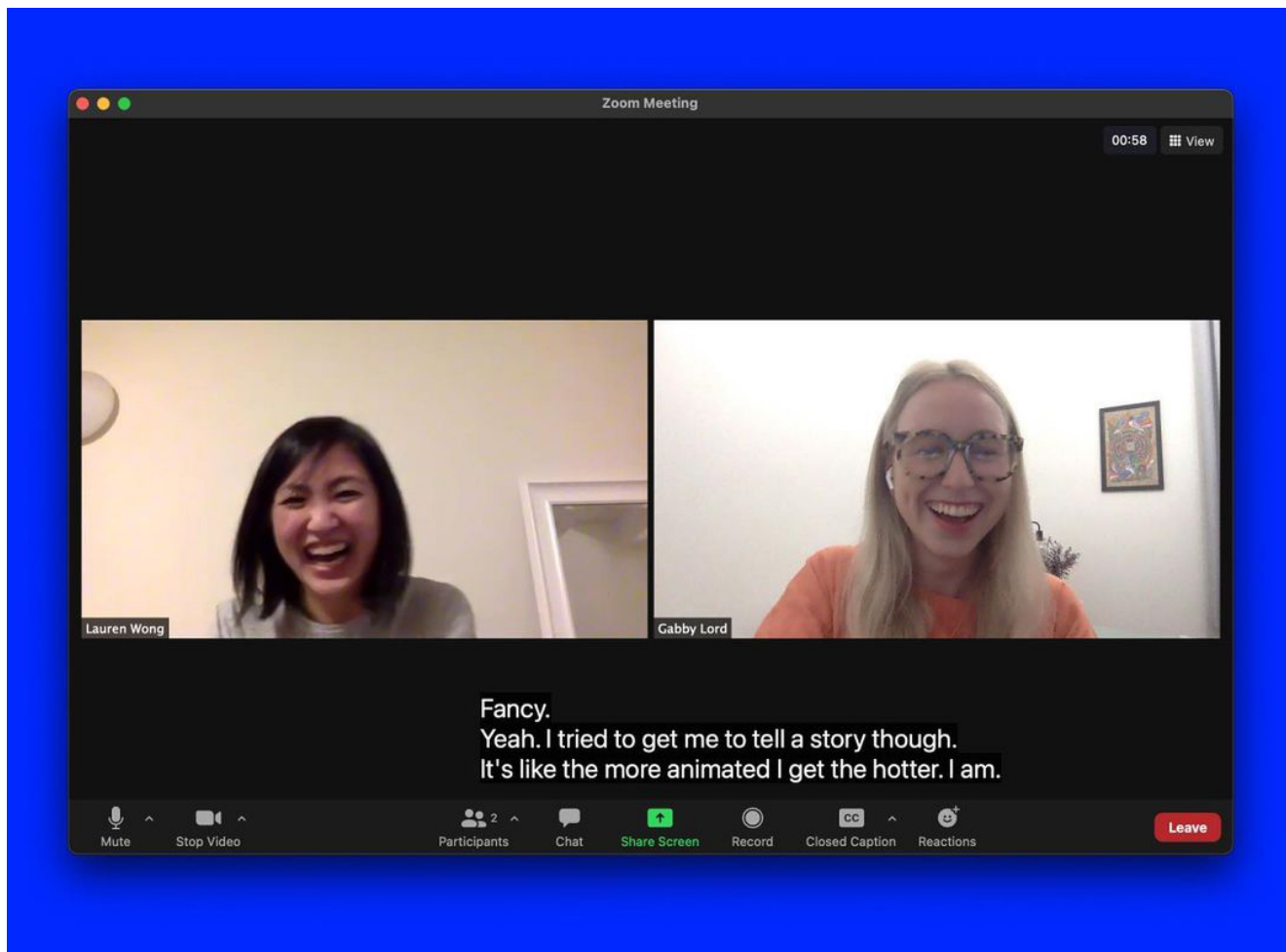


Was great to see you contribute to Never Not Creative's project Never Not International Women's Day. Why did you want to get involved?

Gabby: NNC do so much for the creative industry which is only really possible when people are willing to donate their time. We were happy to be involved!

Lauren: And the night before that video went up, we realized

that we talked about starting Super Keen—but that no one knew Super Keen existed. So Gabby threw together an Instagram account and we officially launched on International Women's Day. We didn't plan for that to happen.

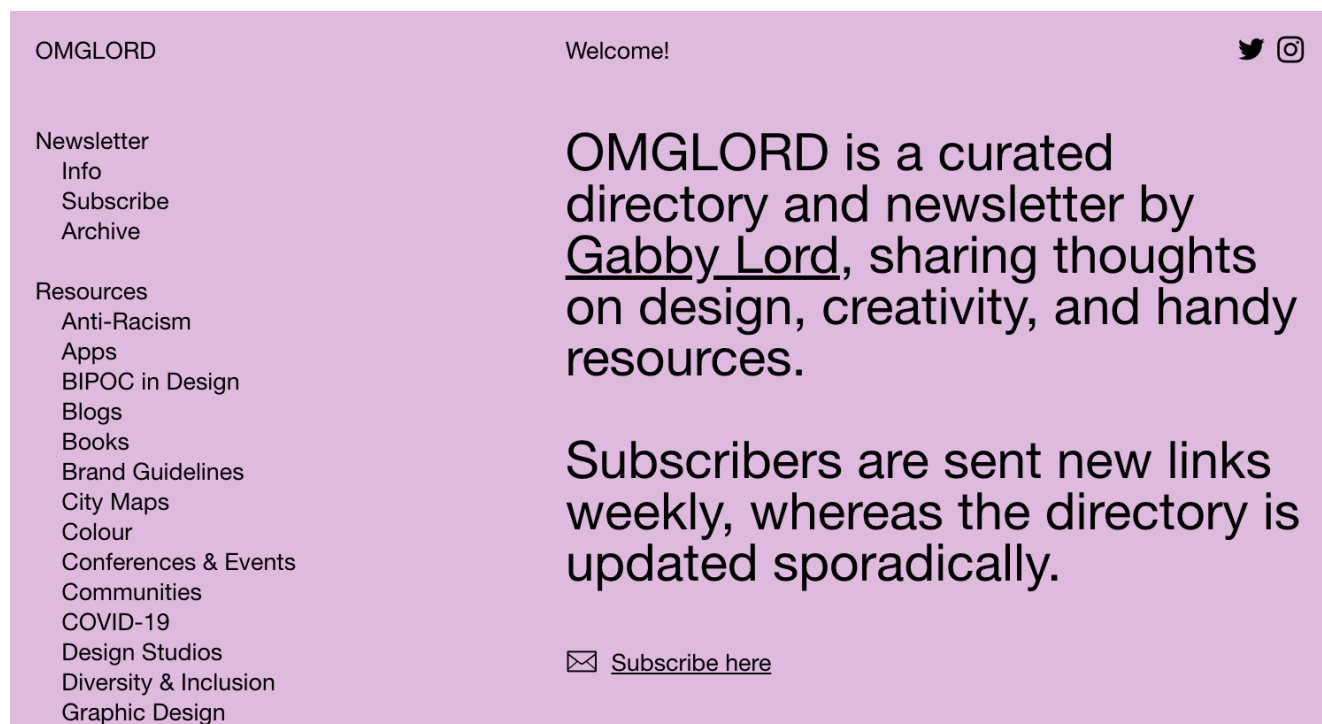


Loved seeing the Instagram behind-the-scenes peek at your colour-coded bookshelf. What books are you both currently reading? Or what's next on your list?

Lauren: I've been really into non-fiction, memoirs, and poetry lately. Right now I'm reading Mismatch by Kat Holmes about designing for inclusion. But other books I'm loving are: Beyond the Gender Binary by Alok Vaid-Menon, Janet Mock's first memoir, Hood Feminism by Mikki Kendall, Glitch Feminism by Legacy Russell, and Finna by Nate Marshall. There's a ton of new books on our studio shelves right now, and I'm keen to read all of them.

Gabby: Lauren is always reading 100 things at once I swear!

I'm a pretty slow reader and I've recently gotten really into audiobooks. I just finished *The Vanishing Half* by Britt Bennet, *A Promised Land* by Barack Obama, and currently trying to get through *Why We Sleep* by Matthew Walker, but it is stressing me out!



Gabby—we're big fans of your design directory/weekly newsletter OMGLORD, which you describe as "Put simply— things that make G-Lord say OMG". How has that resource evolved over the years?

Gabby: The newsletter has evolved SO much and yet the main premise hasn't really changed since day dot. I like to think my writing has gotten better—or a least matured as I have, too. I think over the years it has definitely become less and less about explicit design references and more about life/world observations from a design lens.

Lauren—your LinkedIn profile is seriously impressive, including big client names (Airbnb, ANZ, Converse) at Character, and previous stints at Lippincott and 72andSunny. What's the most unexpected client or challenge you've experienced as a strategist?

Lauren: My favorite surprises are revelations. It usually happens when the team feels super stuck and everything feels like it's going to fall apart... and something clicks into place. Then all of a sudden, the whole team goes nuts and incredible ideas start flying around.

I used to be obsessed with the Matrix growing up, and it's kind of like that. Like, all of a sudden we go from not being able to read the Matrix to bending bullets and shit.

Gabby—in your #ShilloSYD guest lecture you gave some great practical advice about not wasting time on designing a personal logo (“Just pick a nice font, and call it a day.”) or writing a long-winded cover letter. Any other tips for designers on the job hunt?

Gabby: LOL. CALL IT A DAY ALREADY. I just want students to focus on the important stuff, which to me is always going to be the work. Show me how you think, what keeps you up and night, and what makes you want to keep going on this wild ride called life.

It's important to note that these are my tips and every studio is going to want something slightly different from applicants.

When job hunting, really research and study how different places show and talk about their projects. How can you align your application to best suit their format?

Lauren—you've taught at Parsons School for Design in New York City. What did you love about teaching? If you overheard a former student talking about you, what would you hope they were saying? Any tips for current students to make the most of their studies?

Lauren: I love teaching. To me, it's like hosting a really good dinner party. My role as a teacher is to create the space, set the mood, start the conversation. But the students

are really the stars of the show. They're the ones who keep the party going. I hope former students remember the lifelong collaborators they met in class, not me.

To current students, I'd say: learn from everyone. Friends of friends, teammates, random people you meet at a party one night.

Who or what's inspiring you at the moment? Want to share any shout-outs?

Gabby: Always so many people... Antionette Carroll of Creative Reaction Lab, Veronica Fuerte of Hey, Stephanie Specht of Specht Studio, Badel Patel of ByBadel.

Lauren: Jillian Mercado of Black Disabled Creatives, the editorial team behind Atmos, Jenna Wortham + Wesley Morris of Still Processing, Cathy Park Hong who wrote Minor Feelings... There's too many to name, honestly. We're constantly inspired by the people around us.

What's on the horizon for Super Keen? What are you looking forward to for the rest of 2021?

Gabby: I think we are both really excited to be on the same timezone soon!

Who do you want Super Keen to work with?

We're really interested in working with historically excluded founders or communities. To us, that means leaders centering the needs of BIPOC, queer, indigenous, disabled, female and nonbinary communities, to name just a few. There's a lot of incredible people creating equitable, ecological futures; we'd love to help bring their vision to life.

Huge thanks to Gabby and Lauren! Be sure to follow @superkeen.studio on Instagram.

<https://www.shillingtoneducation.com/blog/interview-with-lauren-wong-and-gabby-lord-founders-of-super-keen/>