

Artist Profile **Lauren Carrera**

Interviewed by Jeffrey Scherer, January 30, 2021



Lauren describes her transformation from a scientist to an artist as a “surprise.”

Starting at about the age of 10, Lauren wanted to “cure cancer.” This desire established a clear path for her. As she says “Throughout college and graduate school, I had always made art as a balance to my studies; and I trained as a painter during college at Rutgers. By the time I went to graduate school, I had refined my sense of direction and chose to pursue a career in psychology with an emphasis on behavioral medicine.”

During her graduate work, she was offered the opportunity of going to California as a researcher; at the same time she was nurturing her lifelong interest in art by studying painting. She was awarded an artist grant to spend a summer studying and making art at the Atlin Centre for the Arts in British Columbia near the Yukon with 20 artists from around the world. Two things happened that summer that propelled her from just “making art” to “becoming an artist”—and which eventually steered her away from psychology and toward a full-time practice as a visual artist. First, in the company of 20 accomplished professional artists, it became clear to her that they in turn regarded her as a professional artist. Secondly, she was introduced to a whole new way of thinking about art by two visiting artists who presented slides of installation art—the creation of three-dimensional space in which the viewer’s experience is paramount. These two factors combined to help her consecrate a new career path.

*Making art and experiencing art are ways that are available to us to experience the*

Simultaneously, not wanting to let go of her science background, she realized that science could deeply inform her art. She also realized that her science-training and spiritual practice mutually reinforced each other, and allowed her to practice “deep listening and observation that was devoid of personal content,” which provided a perfect platform to create unique and meaningful art.

While Lauren still enjoys painting, her first love is making 3–dimensional installations that create atmosphere in which the viewer can be transported to a place of introspection and wonder. She believes that her art should not overtly “confront” but rather create a refuge and provide an opportunity where the observer can pause to reflect. As Lauren says “My artistic research, like spirituality and science, is for me, being in a state of ‘beginner’s mind’—a state of not knowing—but being open to what presents itself.” By working diligently to remove her own “ego,” she searches for constructs that bridge universal mythologies across belief systems. Her love of science, natural history and museums inform her artistic research, and enable her to listen for “whispers from the muse.”

Her work, although grounded in science and the natural world primarily, often reflects her own philosophical points of view about the world. For example, the installation work “BUTT-erFLIES” which was shown as part of her “Museo du Profundo Mundo” solo exhibition at Blackfish Gallery, illuminates the confluence between science, art and spirituality. Using found objects (cigarette butts that Lauren picked up over a year in front of her North Coast Seed studios and various gallery spaces in Portland), she transformed them into 1,000 BUTT-erflies, with plastic wings, wire legs and antennae, pinning the “specimens” to the wall in a natural flying configuration, alluding to Wallace and Bates’ collections of



DARWIN DESK WITH BUTT-ERFLIES Blackfish Gallery

butterflies to illustrate Darwin’s theory of natural selection. Each “transformation” from cigarette butt to BUTT-erfly, was constructed with a prayer to the victims of Nagasaki, Hiroshima and Fukushima, but also a prayer for peaceful hearts in our own country. She chose to construct 1,000 BUTT-erflies in the Japanese tradition of folding cranes as a tribute and sacrifice to the gods for answered prayers. Despite the butterflies being made from cigarette butts, wire and plastic, most viewers experienced them as real butterflies pinned to a wall...some even got upset about that. Lauren refers to these reactions as “real alchemical transformation.”

Lauren understands that *desire to spark a moment of reflection and connect to mystery* is probably inherent in her training as a clinical psychologist.



EVERYTHING THAT RISES MUST CONVERGE

One of her installation pieces, “EVERYTHING THAT RISES MUST CONVERGE,” manifests Lauren’s desire to create in the viewer a sense of wonder and awe. This work is centered on the idea of each of us reaching a metaphorical Omega Point. The art installation was inspired by the writings of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (a paleontologist and Catholic priest) who conceived of evolution as a process which began with the creation of the world, but continues through man’s social and spiritual evolution. He believed that we continue to evolve to become more godlike, and as we rise, “everything that rises must converge on the Omega Point”—defined as a place of unity with God. That installation, exhibited at Gallery 114 in 2019, started with an ordinary found object, an old

wooden ladder that came free in the corner of her studio at North Coast Seed Company. She says "I thought...ah, a gift from the GODS!! I worked with the symbolism of birds as messengers from earth to heaven and placed the golden ladder (hand wrapped with gold leaf) in a huge pile of plasticized and shredded books...with birds and handmade cardboard shoes...reflecting on humanity's ambivalent relationships with knowledge and with God."



NUCLEAR FAMILY: ASCENT OF MAN

Lauren is currently working on a series of 12 80" x 36" panels depicting sacred moments in life using composite and actual portraits. Her painting "Momentum" (mixed media) is featured on the cover of the just released book "Certain and Impossible Events" (Kore Press).



THE PERMANENT COLLECTION W/ IV BAGS ON CHANDELIER. 18' X 8'



Lauren in her studio at No. Coast Seed with painting "ALCHEMY"