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PNTG 741 Summer 22  
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SCAD

## *The Love Cycle*

The characters of Lauren Nielsen's narrative series *The Love Cycle* are about the friendship of a dog and a butterfly. When I asked Lauren about why she selected to tell the story through animals rather than people she replied, "I want to share a story where everybody can resonate and be reminded people are not going to stay in our life forever. This is a normal thing."

Lauren's first painting of the series titled *Growth* (Fig.1) immediately gives the viewer up close perspective of the narrative and insight to the characters' experience within viewing the series. In fact, each painting thoughtfully captures the viewer's attention to the significant moments of this meaningful story. Lauren achieves this by using dynamic placement of imagery, color and lighting. These tasks are not easy to achieve, yet Lauren has done so by effective composition decisions along with palette preparation and paint application. The scenes of this series are completely honed into the moments of the dog and butterfly spending time together outside in their natural surroundings. If we could be standing outside with the dog and butterfly in this painting *Growth* (Fig.1), the most you would hear would be a bird chirping in the background or maybe a rustle of leaves in the gentle breeze. Lauren's short story in oil painting invites you into the enchanting moments of life's profound companions in furry friends and fleeting creatures.



Figure 1. *Growth*, 12x12, Oil on canvas, 2022

Taking a closer look at how Lauren's imagery mingles, notice the bright green leaves and one leaf above the dog, especially mimicking the dog's joy, are the entry point. The leaves circulate the butterfly character and dog just below that is looking up towards the butterfly upon a bed of fresh green grass in dappled sunlight. Lauren gives the viewer variety through shape and color that sparks interest in wondering what will happen next. The near and far positioning of characters at immediate glance could indicate the tone of narrative. Using the complimentary colors of blue for butterfly and orange for bone creates a visual charge to take in the surroundings of nature and life in this scene. Lauren takes special care with value and hue to define the dog and brushstrokes to distinguish the existing natural surroundings. The delicacy of light hues applied on particular leaves, tips of bone and dogs ears hone in on the attention the dog has for its butterfly friend at this moment.





In painting two titled *B.F.F.'s* (Fig.2), Lauren intensifies the relationship by strategically positioning the dog and butterfly again at a diagonal in the composition. *B.F.F.'s* demonstrates excellent balance of value and scale in a composition. Perspective is also a key player in this narrative so that the scale of the butterfly is now equal to the dog as any cherished friendship would be in walking through life alongside each other. I asked Lauren, How much of the narrative have you envisioned prior to the painting? She replied, "All of it." Lauren is direct and simple yet as you can see an incredible and thoughtful painter showing compassion for life in all creatures.



Figure 2. *B.F.F.'s*, 11x14, Oil on canvas, 2022

Lauren unites the characters in *B.F.F.'s* (Fig.2) now by elevating the details of features of both in this friendly duo.. The soft fur coat of the black and tan dog is just under the patterned wing of a brilliant blue butterfly. Curiosity and compassion can be felt between the dog and butterfly by the way Lauren has captured the dog's upward gaze in this visual communication. Notice how there is nothing in between the dog and the butterfly. Rather than the butterfly carefully hiding behind a leaf, the butterfly is open winged and hovering just above the dog. The loving exchange is supported once again by a bed of fresh and cool green grass in dappled sunlight. This strategic composition may imply the intensity and value of a friendship and somewhat unexpected friendship of a four legged friend with a winged creature. Lauren creates two washes of orange on the perimeter of the moment to lock in the scene. The momentum is now

evident that Lauren builds by putting much thought into selecting just the right composition for each frame to tell this powerful story.



Figure 3. *Adventures*, 12x12, Oil on canvas, 2022.

Painting three, *Adventures* (Fig.3) gives the viewer an opportunity to settle into the narrative in the visual repetition of color as well as the pattern and texture of brushstrokes. Lauren illustrates a beautiful scene with the forest floor path as the entry point. Neutral hues and flecks of warm yellow lead are along the path and bring us to the dog and butterfly in their stroll through the woods. Lauren takes special care again in the supportive greenery of the scene to apply shades of green that show the presence of sun. The full green shrub on lower right is diagonal to a tree line that starts upper left locking in the focus of characters along the path that curves to the right. I can see this story animated which is not necessary but at the same time engaging and a bonus as an invested viewer to feel the connection. The hues begin to



fade at this point in both character and supporting imagery which causes a signal to what the characters are experiencing in their friendship as they walk together. Lauren shares her composition intentions by stating, "we have to appreciate our relationships because we just don't know what's around the corner and that it's a change but it's a change we have to face." The composition and color application selected for painting three, viewers may make connections at this point in the series as Lauren effectively provides the space to reflect and prepare for the fourth painting in the series that sheds light beyond the path and to the right.

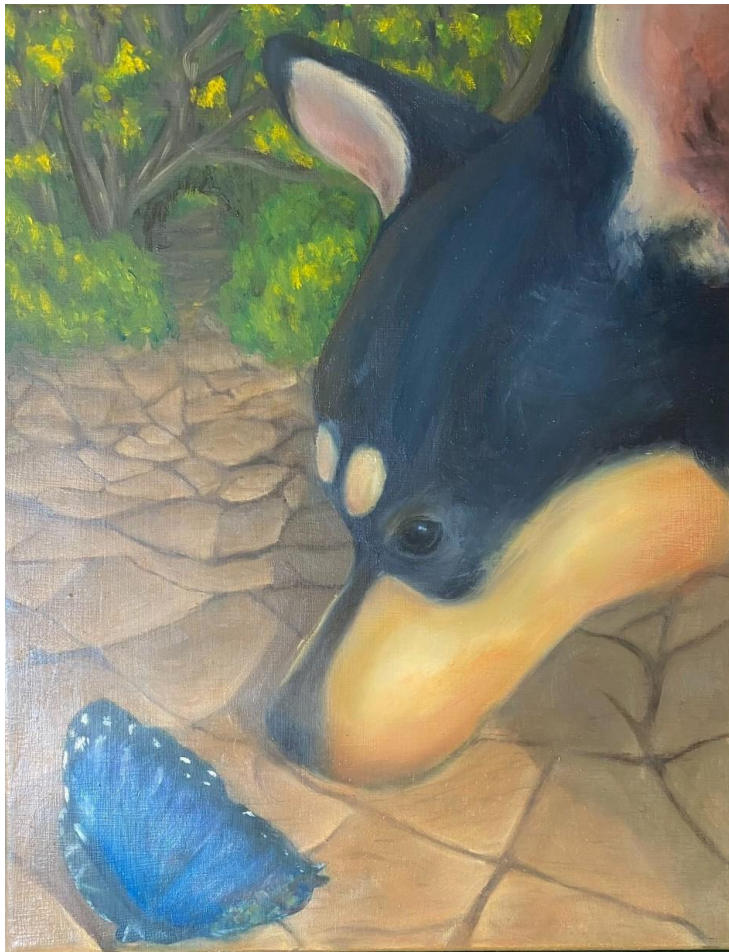


Figure 4. *Death*, 11x14, Oil on canvas, 2022.

*Death* (Fig. 4) at this time brings the viewer to the outcome of the friendship between the dog and the butterfly. While the terrace stones of the scene are lit by the sun, we are looking down at a somber dog missing his friend. Lauren brings a swift conclusion in this painting by bringing both characters from the whiskered chin up and hovering blue wings to ground level. This swift change of scene is effective in the connections that can be made across all creatures. The absence of life in the butterfly is felt as the lush green path shifts to stone with the lowbrow of a dog that creates a sense of longing. In the stages of life and power of friendship, Lauren has effectively selected creatures, supportive imagery and scenes to illustrate with direction and compassion.



Figure 5. *Grief*, 11x14, Oil on canvas, 2022.

Lauren's strategy to partner the conclusion with a stage floor of stone grounds establishes a moment for the viewer to see the dog's feeling of loss as the chin rests over its paws and looks up to a faded butterfly painted to blend into neutral surroundings. The supportive imagery is effective in how the scale of the stones get smaller as they go back into the picture plane and the life remaining is completely focused on the dog looking up now. I asked Lauren, "What would you hope the audience to take in from your work?" She replied, "Maybe they would appreciate all of their relationships a bit more. In the loss of my own mother, I am not happy with the ending, but like the grass growing through the stone indicates, there is hope."