Chatting with Lisa Congdon with CBTV Live

Chapter 1 - Chapter 1
A Chat with Lisa Congdon
- Hey everybody, it's Courtney from Creativebug, and we're coming at you live like we always do on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and like I promised you on Tuesday, I have Lisa with me in the studio. - Hello, Courtney! - This is Lisa Congdon, for those of you who don't know her work, she is a long-time Creativebug instructor, an artist, an illustrator, a letterer, an author, a proud puppy owner of Wilfredo, if you don't know him, you should check him out. What else do you do, you do a lot of stuff. - Yeah, well, I teach. - Also a teacher. - Yeah, I make books, I'm an illustrator, a pattern designer. - Do a lot of lectures and things too, all over-- - Yeah, I do public speaking, in fact, I've got one in Portland a week from tomorrow. I gotta go home and prepare on Monday. - And she was here in San Francisco this week filming with us for our newest series of classes, and you've got all the weather, we had like two 90-degree days, and then yesterday was freezing. - Yes. - Now we're like, back to the middle. And what are you filming with us this time? - It's still freezing outside. I used to live here, so I'm kind of used to it, but, what are my new classes? - Yeah, what are you filming this week? - So, we filmed a whole new series, it's going to be six weeks long, so it's like my longest series ever. - It's coming out in January, so stay tuned for that. - Yeah, probably the first week of January-ish, but we'll keep you posted. And we took a slightly different approach to this class, since I've done a lot of classes in the past that are about really specific designs that you can create in your sketchbook, or an approach to drawing. My first class is maybe more similar to these, basic line drawing. We're really diving into the process of making art, and sort of stepping back and thinking about not just making a specific design, but thinking about how you approach your work, like what colors do you use, and why do you use the colors you use? And thinking about drawing and painting in a simpler way. - Seems like a more holistic approach to creative practice. - Yeah, yeah. And we're sort of, there's some parts where we explore working abstractly versus working representationally, like painting and drawing something that is recognizable versus something that's more abstract. And some of the weeks have multiple approaches and activities, and some of the weeks are a little bit more about the process, and you can kind of take it where you want it-- - Which I really love, like you've been working with all different kinds of medium, we got a little bit of paper collage, some painting with different types of paint, some drawing, of course, which you're known for. - I think we've used pretty much every medium, so we've used Microns, gel pens, watercolor-- - Some colored pencil, even. - Acrylic paint, oil pastels, colored pencils, and cut paper collage. - Yeah, it's been pretty awesome. - There may be more. - You guys are gonna be super inspired in January, it's gonna be so exciting. At the very least, you wear a fabulous outfit every single day. Everyone's been commenting on this awesome sweater-- - Outside of making art, clothes are my life. - Yeah, and you also have a really awesome jewelry collection. - Thank you. I'm not actually wearing very much of it today. I usually only wear my necklaces and stuff when I have something that they're not gonna clash with, this sweater sort of like does the jewelry for itself. - Is it vintage? It's really cute. - No, I think it's made to look vintage, but it's not vintage. I was wearing an outfit the first day where there was like the top part of it was red, and people were asking that, "Where did you get that?" I posted it on Instagram, and I think you guys posed it too, it's vintage, so sadly, I can't tell you where I got it. - And your glasses are new too since the last time I saw you. - Yeah, I got these this summer. - That's awesome, they're really cute, and I feel like I've noticed, in

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your work, you've talked about it too, that you've had like a pretty intense love with blue recently. - Yeah, that actually, I've always loved blue, but last summer, so a little bit over a year ago, I did a residency in Hudson, New York, actually, Courtney's going there next week, so you can follow along on her adventures, but I decided while I was there that I was going to paint or draw, or collage, mostly in the color blue. I had this parameter of mostly blue with some pops of other colors, and I had so much fun working that way for three weeks while I was there, that I decided to continue it this year, so, as a result, so much of my work has blue in it, or is blue, and even though the year's almost over, at this point, I can't imagine that I'll stop, and now I've just sort of integrated it into my wardrobe as well, so, yeah. - It's been really interesting, Lisa and I have been friends for, I don't know, four, five--? - Five years. - Something like that, and to think, some of the early pieces that I have of yours in my house, a lot of them, it's like a lot of hot pink, which I still think of as a color of yours, but now it's been super enjoyable for me to just kinda follow along and see the evolutions of color palettes, and just like how you're growing as an artist, the abstracts that have come in, the large scale for all the commissions and stuff you've done in the last year. - I'll say, even in the last five years, my work has, I think I sort of started to really solidify my voice as an artist about five or six years ago, but even in that amount of time, it's gotten even tighter, I think. - Which I love. - Yeah, well, thank you. - You guys don't forget that we're live, which means you can write in and ask us questions, you can ask Lisa questions, we're just here painting, Lisa did some really beautiful blue silhouette shapes that she's drawing in with white gel pen, we're sipping tea, it's a very casual conversation, and I think Allison has a question for us. - [Allison] We do, so Ask Jones asked, "Lisa, how did you first get started?" - We're gonna repeat the question just in case you guys can't hear, so Ask Jones is asking Lisa how she got started. - Well, for those of you don't already know, listen, many of you do, I am 48, going on 49 years old, and I've only been doing this professionally for about 10 years, and I started painting and drawing about 17 years ago, so I had a number of years in there where painting and drawing was just a hobby, and an exploration, but basically, I was working in the nonprofit education world, and, super happy at my job, had amazing coworkers, and worked for an organization that I really believed in in public education. And, somewhere in there, I both went through a breakup of a very long-term relationship. - That always causes change. - And I also was sort of itching for, like I realized that simultaneous to the ending of this long relationship, which ended up being a good thing, I had this like space in my life, and I felt like I wanted to fill it with something besides another relationship, and so I just was on this journey to sort of figure out how to, you know, feel like more of a whole person, and part of that was tapping into-- - You were doing a lot of collage really early, right? - Yeah, so one of the first things I started doing was collaging, collaging is actually a really great way to start making, if you don't know how to paint or draw, because it's super forgiving, and you don't have to know how to paint or draw. - You can cut up the elements, but then you're really honing your sense of color and balance and composition too, which is something that you're gonna talk about in these classes. - Yeah. - Which is really awesome. - For sure. And anyway, let me finish telling my story, jeez! - Everyone's so eager, I know we have some more questions. - Okay, but I'll finish, I just wanna, so, obviously, I kept drawing and painting as a hobby, I then, Flickr came around, and I started sharing my work online, I started a blog, this was in around 2004, this is a long time ago, over 10 years ago, and then I started getting inquiries, like, "Can I buy that? "You should sell that." And my work looked a lot different back then, but I just kept making, and eventually by 2007, I left my job, and started making art almost full-time, and now I make art more than full-time, it feels like, so it was a long process of about 12 years to get from there to here, but. - And there you were a shop owner too and a great art supporter, you had a lot

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of shows, and you contributed to a lot of good shows. - I did own a store in San Francisco back in the day, yeah. - That's awesome. I think we have some more questions. - Sorry. - [Allison] Okay, Priscilla asks, "Now that you're starting the fall season, "how do different seasons influence your inspiration, "and which season is your favorite?" - Priscilla's asking how seasons influence Lisa's work, and which season is her favorite? - Well, that's a really kind of a tossup for me, I think in the end, it's spring, because, especially in Portland where I live now, I used to live here, by the way, in San Francisco, but so many, everything is in bloom, and you're just sort of, like, bombarded with all these different colors all the time, especially pink, which I love. I also really love December, because I love Christmas, and I'm really into folk pattern, and Scandinavian and German folk pattern and design, and so, I'm obviously really into that season as well, and I think I tend to make a lot of things that are not necessarily Christmas-influenced, but folk-influenced-- - Yeah, like your red and white palette or your blue and white palette. - But there's something about every season, and I think for fall, it's really the color. One of the things I love about living in Portland, which you don't get as much in California, is just the change of the color of the leaves, and you can tell that it's fall when you walk outside, and it's like, all of a sudden, goes from really hot to sort of cool and brisk, and you wanna go inside with your tea, and-- - Wear your sweaters. - Yeah. I like all of the seasons for different reasons, but I'm excited about fall. - If you guys haven't checked out CBTV, we just had an episode released with Lisa's studio tour, and we were up there filming, it was full spring, all those cherry blossom trees. - Yeah, back in April. - [Courtney] Were in full bloom, and then by the end of the week, all of the streets were just pink, they were just completely pink with these blossoms, so check out CBTV, I think Allison's gonna be posting a link for you, it's got a great tour of Lisa's new studio and working space, where she does her illustration packages of books and her Etsy orders. - [Lisa] My flat files. - [Courtney] Yeah, it's a like a great little tour, we even have a little bit of her paintings, some of your fine art practice there. - Yep. - Just pretty awesome. What are you working on right now? - Oh, I've fallen in love with this blue acrylic wash, and some of you may have noticed on my Instagram yesterday, I posted a cup that I painted with the paint, and I just love the color, and I love how the gouache dries matte, as opposed to glossy, and so I decided today to do some color blocking of some circles and other sort of floral shapes across the spread, and now I'm highlighting with my white gel pen, super simple, but something that I love to do, yeah. What are you drawing, Courtney? - Well, I started drawing a still life, at some point, I'm gonna add a second layer, because we all know with watercolor, it takes a minute, and I have to let things dry. - I painted my shapes hours ago. - She was very prepared. Yeah, we had a bit of a wonder today, which was really fun. If you guys are not familiar with Lisa's slew of classes on Creativebug, we're gonna be posting her instructor page, we've got draw days with her, a creative sketchbook series, and like I said, her newest series of six classes is gonna be coming out in January, so make sure you stay tuned for that. We've got some great CBTV episodes with her as well, and we have another question. - [Allison] Emily asks, "Lisa, what are "your favorite artistic influences?" - Lisa's asking what-- - No, Emily. - Sorry, Emily is asking Lisa what her favorite artistic influences are. - Well, I mentioned that I really love Scandinavian design, and like folk patterns, sort of traditional, both traditional Scandinavian design, and mid-century design, so I'm pretty influenced by that, and I love graphic design from the mid-century, and then, into the '70s, a lot of the fine art that I'm doing right now is really influenced by the '70s, and graphic design in general. People often comment that my work is influenced, some of my work, not all of it, 'cause my work's sort of all over the place, but, is influenced by Mary Blair, who is the artist who designed the Small World in Disneyland, and-- - She's an amazing illustrator. Did you see that show at the Disney Museum? - Yeah, and I have several

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books of her work, and so years and years ago, I started making these drawings of fantastical buildings that were inspired by the ones she had drawn back in the '40s and '50s and '60s. And, oh gosh, I just love modern art in general, so Picasso, Calder, Ellsworth Kelly-- - A lot of bright, bold colors, flat shapes. - Warhol, there's a Warhol show opening at the Portland Museum of Art, soon, like next week or something, and I'm going to the opening party, so I'm very excited about that, 'cause I love Warhol too, so yeah. - Do you know what dress you're gonna wear? - Not yet, I might have to buy a new one. - That was an excuse to buy a new frock, don't you think? - Yes. - That's awesome. - Yeah. - We have another question. - [Allison] So we have a couple of questions about Lisa's process, meaning at the launch of your first book, and I think a couple fellow artists who are wondering, what was the process to get your first book? - Well-- - So we have a question-- - Oh, sorry. - No, it's okay, I'm just gonna repeat in case you guys didn't hear, several artists, commenters who are asking about what the process was like leading up to your first book publication. Which you're many in deep now. - Yeah, I'm actually working on my eighth book right now, I just finished my seventh. So, my first book was actually called A Collection a Day, and it was a project that I did over the year 2010, where I posted every day a picture of one of my weird collections, I have lots of weird collections of small, mostly vintage things, mostly erasers, yeah, every day for a year, and then Janine, who runs UPPERCASE Magazine, which by the way, if you're not familiar with UPPERCASE, you should be, it's an amazing magazine. - Such a great resource, so many talented artists. - Anyway, she came to me, and at the time, she was publishing small runs of, you know, she's an independent publisher, so she published A Collection a Day, and they're only-- - Was that where The Suitcase Series? - Yeah. Well, no, no, no, no, it was after The Suitcase Series, but not part of it. Anyway, so that was my first book, and it came out of a project, and actually, my second book also came out of a project, so two years later, I did 365 Days of Hand Lettering, Chronicle approached me and were like, "We need to make some version of this into a book," and so we decided to take 100 of the best quotations from that project, I hand-lettered something different every day for a whole year, just to actually, my motivation was not to make a book, it was to get better at hand-lettering. Developing my own style, I wasn't necessarily studying how to be a hand-letterer from the experts, it was more just like, I do a lot of things the renegade way, like, I just figure them out myself, or I develop my own style in a way that feels comfortable to me. - And when was that, what year was that? - 2012, and then that book came out in 2013-- - And that's like one of your prime-- - That book has sold 130,000 copies, so-- - But it's one of your prime, hand-lettering's one of your prime, kind of most-- - Yeah, yeah, so that got me into it, it's also a prime source of my income. - Which is awesome! - Yeah, but then I did a sequel, and I got my report yesterday, and it hasn't sold quite as many copies, and that book is called Fortune Favors the Brave, and that's another book of hand-lettered quotations. So I've never actually pitched a book to a publisher before, I wrote a book called Art, Inc., which I didn't illustrate, but it's about the business of making, or becoming an artist. - It's a great resource for people who're interested. - Yeah, and then I published another book, or two books, with, well, six coloring books and one drawing book with Quarto Publishing, 20 Ways to Draw a Tulip, and then there's six coloring books, so including the coloring books, I have more like, 14 books or something, but I don't count the coloring books so much, 'cause they're coloring books, not to diss any color-- - Kind of a different beast, yeah, and she references those in some of her classes-- - Yeah, yeah. And then last year, or earlier this year, another book of mine came out that's writing and illustration, it's called The Joy of Swimming, 'cause I'm a lifelong swimmer and I love the water, and then I'm working on a book right now that will come out next year, it's called A Glorious Freedom, on being a woman growing older and living

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an extraordinary life, and it's a collection of profiles, interviews with, and, essays by women over 40 who are-- - Fabulous. - Yes, yeah, and I'm illustrating the whole thing. - That's awesome. - Yeah, and then I'm just starting The Big Book of First Ladies, which is a children's book about the First Ladies of the United States, which will come out not until 2018. - That's not a coloring book, though, that's a kid's book. - No, that's like 120-page children's book that's gonna heavily researched, and-- - That's awesome. - Yeah. - I think you were like knee-deep into the fabulous woman one, the women over 40. - Yes, I was also illustrating another book for Penguin Random House that somebody else wrote when you were there, that may be what I was more stressed out about than the other book. But yeah, making and illustrating books is like a really big part of what I do now. - And the hand-lettering too, which is awesome. - Yeah, and actually, the book I was illustrating for Penguin Random House was all hand-lettering, and some illustrations, yeah. - That's awesome. It sounds like, I mean, obviously, I know you're super passionate about everything you do, you work really hard, there's such a variety of things that you do, how do you take a moment for yourself to get re-inspired, or just take a break when you're feeling like you have to be creative all the time? - My weekends, I try to keep really precious, yeah, and I will work really hard, including doing personal projects, which to sort of loop back to Emily's original question, part of how I got book deals is just doing what I love, and putting it out into the world, and then I happen to get noticed, and there are different ways to pitch books and to make books, and to get your book ideas into the world, but a lot of what I do is, is personal projects, so what little free time I have, I'm often drawing in my sketchbook, or like working on my Experiments in Blue project, or working on my fine art. - And you love to travel too! - And I love to travel, so that's another thing I do. - Lisa was telling me how many planes she'd been on this year. - Yeah, so like 28 different airplanes since January. Part of that is work. Yeah, I do travel a lot for work. Only one of those trips was for fun, I went to France on vacation with my sister and my niece, and then I went to the south of France by myself, we went to Paris first. But, yeah, and I'd been to London earlier this year to speak at Blogtacular, which is a big blogging conference in Europe, in London, and yeah, so weekends are really sacred for me, I try not to work in the weekends, and I try not to work at night, unless I'm under some excruciating deadline, which I sometimes am. And I get outside, I love to get on my bike, I love to hike, go to the movies, I love to eat. I obviously love to go shopping. - You cook too, right? - Yes, I like to cook, I sew, and I haven't been sewing a lot lately, 'cause I have had all these book deadlines, but I just bought a bunch of new fabric, and some sewing patterns, I'm gonna sew a lot this winter, I think, and I love just hanging out at home. I'm kinda old, I get tired easily, so, sitting at home and cooking and eating, and watching awesome British crime dramas on Netflix, that's like my idea of a good time. - Do you have like a favorite TV show? - Well, right now, we're wrapping up Hinterland, which is pretty new, it takes place in Wales, and it's really dark, but I'm really into it. - That sounds awesome. - Yeah. I've watched pretty much all of them, so. - Do you doodle when you're watching TV? - Oh yeah, yeah. Sometimes, we have to put the subtitles on the British ones so that I can understand them, so like, like, doodling, listening, and watching the subtitles at one time is a little complicated, so sometimes I just have to close the sketchbook and put it away, because otherwise I'll lose track of what's going on. - Does what wind up like, I can just see since you are doing so much hand-lettering, do you wind up with some random subtitle in your sketchbook, like, "Oh wait, "that's not what I intended." - No, no. No. - I feel like that kind of stuff happens to me all the time, like my brush goes in my tea all the time. - Oh, my brush goes in my tea all the time too, but yeah, and sometimes I even drink my watercolor water, yeah. - Yeah, that happens. - Yeah. - [Courtney] Are you reading anything great right Now? - Well, I just picked up Ann Patchett's latest book, and I'm about two chapters into that,

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I've been so tired at night after taping that-- - We've packed her week like really full. - Yeah, but I'm excited to finish that, it's already sucking me in. - Awesome, we have another question. - [Allison] Speaking of your next class, Karina wants to know, "What is your next class "going to be about?" - Oh, so Karina, it sounds like some people may just be joining us, and they missed the beginning of the shoot, our live shoot, so I'm here with Lisa Congdon, she's been here all week filming her newest series, it's a series of six classes, it's going to launch in January. Do you wanna do just like a little brief recap? - Yeah, it's really, slightly different than, like, we're gonna do activities, and I'm gonna say, here's the materials you need, and here's how you dig in, and this is how you do it. Of course, it wouldn't be teaching as much otherwise, but we're really delving more into the process of making, and the reason I think that's important is, I think it's important as individuals for everyone to sort of form an attachment to colors that they like, and use those intentionally in their work, and like markers and shapes, and ways of working that become yours, I'm hoping this class will really help people find their own voice, instead of, not that it's not okay to copy what I teach you to do, but really, to branch out and do your own thing, and make something entirely yours, because that's how you become-- - An artist in your own right. - Yeah, exactly, exactly. - It's been really interesting, just developing these classes, and preparing before you came, and I just really appreciated your enthusiasm, just, you've done so much over the course of the year, so much with us, even, and just approaching this with a different kind of passion and approach to art-making, which has been really cool to see. - Yeah, well. - And we're in a massive sketchbook. - Yeah, it's the biggest, we don't have it here, but, so it's an A3 size, which, for those of you in Europe, that's probably pretty familiar to you, but it's like giant-- - It's the biggest sketchbooks Moleskine makees-- - I went to this, there's an art store near my house in Portland called Columbia Art, and I go in there all of the time to get my supplies, and I was perusing all of the sketchbooks, and my eyes just about popped out of my head when I saw it, because I'd never seen one that big, and I have like the medium one, and then the, like this is the same brand I use, to me, this is kind of small. The A3's almost too big, like you couldn't carry it around in your bag, but it was so freeing to work so big, and that's part of what we're gonna talk about in this class, is like, getting loose, and like, freeing yourself up, and working bigger, and that doesn't necessarily mean having a bigger sketchbook, maybe you could buy a bigger pad of paper, or, you know. - And that's something that I really appreciated you talking about in the course of this class, so much of what you do is really detailed. - It's very precise, and even though it's imperfect, it's also, it's precious, there's control, and I started this thing called the messy sketchbook in January, because I felt like I was spending so much of my time being precious, and making things look just so, and while that gives me a certain amount of satisfaction, it also, I think limits me, and so I've been trying to work bigger and get messier, and work more intuitively in my paintings, to counterbalance the work, this kind of work, like, I'm never gonna stop doing this kind of work, but, yeah. - That's something I really love about this series, these are kind of exercises, if you will, not so specific to a project, but exercises that you employed just to spark creativity in your own practice. - Yeah, like most of them are things I've already done, and myself, either in the last year, or in the last 10 years, to like, help me become a better artist. - We are gonna do a little tiny class out of this series that is on the messy sketchbook, and she uses a vintage book, which is pretty awesome, gives you an opportunity to kind of use an outside reference and source material for beginning the work, which I love. - Yeah. - It's super cool. Do we have any other questions, Allison? I think, we probably kept you here long enough, are you exhausted? - [Lisa] Oh, no, I'm fine. (chuckling) - [Courtney] It's been a long week, but it's been an awesome week having you back. - Yeah, and I know people have commented that, they're like, "The classes can't come soon enough!" But people here at

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Creativebug work really hard to edit them down to the essential points, and to get them, 'cause believe me, we sit here, to film one class takes way longer than what ends up being in the class, and so we gotta edit it, a lot of it is bloopers, right? Me just starting to say something and messing up and going, (blows raspberry) that's my signal for, I need to start over, yeah. And then, they've gotta figure out how to promote it, and get it out, and so it takes some time, but be patient, January will be here before you know it. - And you are going to need a refresher and spark of creativity in January after the holidays, so the timing's perfect. - I was gonna say, in the meantime, if you haven't taken any of my classes, that's a good place to start, because I think this class builds on a lot of them. - Absolutely, so if it's your first time to Creativebug, your first time with Lisa's classes, or if you've taken all of them religiously, I think you're gonna be really excited about this new series. If you haven't checked her classes out, you can use the code Facebook 30, to get 30 free days of Creativebug, you should also check out CBTV, 'cause we got some great behind-the-scenes studio tour with Lisa in Portland in her new space. - And there'll be more CBTV coming down the pipe too. - There's gonna be a lot. Thanks you guys for joining us live, and we'll see you next week! - Bye!

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