

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Lisa Segal: A Self Interview

Lisa Segal · Wednesday, February 27th, 2019

You've lived in Los Angeles over three decades. Do you have to make that *Chinatown* “my daughter/my sister” choice between being a poet/writer and an artist?

For me the boundaries are porous. It's the same creative process whether I'm writing or in the studio. My poetry became part of my art one day as I was editing a poem, erasing lines. The lines that were left made a square! In the studio, I work with primary shapes. The moment I saw the poem as a square, not a poem, it opened new territory. It gave me a way to put my poems in my artwork. But more than that, my approach to both is the same. I aim to be open to whatever might happen. When I'm writing a first draft, I don't interrupt myself to edit it. In the studio, it's the same. I wait until I have enough of something to start refining it.



Basho's Crow: Flower Street
Writing and making art require time alone. Do you also work with others?

13?h x 56?w x 1 1/2?d

It's a big world to discover all by myself. I found my poetry and art communities studying with two long-time L.A. teachers, the poet Jack Grapes and the artist Tom Wudl. It's been over twelve years that I've been working with both of them.

How have they been helpful?

Their philosophies center around the creative process as organic and exploratory, where “not-knowing” is part of art making, not something an artist eventually outgrows—what John Keats calls “negative capability.” Both stress the mastery of technique as an ongoing endeavor and the importance of not editing yourself when you should be playing.

Jack Grapes' Method Writing uses concepts that get a writer to the emotional realism of their deep voice, then builds on that with tonal dynamics and narrative techniques that use images in a cinematic manner.

Tom Wudl facilitates an artist's exploration into the lesser developed aspects of their nature and out of their comfort zones with the goal to free them to make the art they want to make.

What happens when you can't write? Or make art? How do you break through?

There's an important word left out of that universal question, the word "good." Nobody gets stuck making bad art. It's when they try to make "good" art that they get stuck. I never get stuck, because I'm not afraid of making bad art. It's only in the fearless process of making bad art that good art emerges. If every time I began a work of art, I thought to myself, "This better be good," I wouldn't put pen to paper or paintbrush to canvas. So, when I feel the slightest resistance to the process, I reset myself by practicing something specific. I might write using both high and low language, alternating writing as if I were talking to you with more "poetic" language. In the studio, I'll paint squares with the same red paint on ten different kinds of paper. I remember to trust the process, to play. Doing something leads to the next thing. Product might come, but I don't think about that when I start out. If you're afraid to make bad art, you'll never make good art.