

Lisa Baermann – Senior Director of Fund Development & Alumni Relations

Lisa Baermann: Welcome to Masterclass. This session is designed especially for you, our parents. As Suki and I were meeting with Concordia's faculty members about Concordia fund project, we realized just how packed our faculty is with experts. They are composers, researchers, authors, artists, and scientists. All experts in their fields, who bring their experiences to the classrooms every day to work with our students. We thought you would like to learn about these experiences. We hope you enjoy Masterclass.

Lisa Baermann: Welcome back to Masterclass. Today we are sitting down with Stephanie Barenz Wiegman. She is an Elementary School art teacher and a professional artist.
Thanks for being here today!

Stephanie Wiegman – Elementary School Fine Art Teacher & Professional Artist

Stephanie Wiegman: Thanks for having me!

Lisa Baermann: I'm so glad to sit down with you. I first started to think about interviewing you when I attend your gallery art show this fall at the Sino Art Space. I was so impressed with the pieces that you've created and the scale of them. So, I was thinking about how this experiences as a professional artist impacts you in the classroom as a classroom teacher.

Stephanie Wiegman: That's a great question. As a professional artist, you are going through that process of creating, which you have really high highs and really low lows. Because I go through that process, I know what my students are going through. And I create everyday. Everyday I create a piece of art. So, when I see a child struggling, or feeling defeated, or maybe they made a mistake, and they're just feeling really bad about themselves and their art, you know, maybe I've had the same experience before when I make a piece of art. So, I think it really helps me to empathize with them. When I try out different media, different materials, or even what you've talked about, different scales, I think "oh, how can I integrate this into my teaching," because I've had that experience of making, and I'm really owning that skill. So, I think, "I can maybe do a big painting on the ground with the students," which I'd done. Or maybe I can teach them these tools or this cool new drawing app that I'm using, too. So, I think it just help keep me sharp, because I'm constantly learning, but then it also helps me through that their creative process and what they may be feeling. Because to create you have to be very vulnerable, and you have to be willing to make those mistakes. I always really want to approach my students with that kind of empathy.

Lisa Baermann: It seems like it makes you really able to relate to their whole process. You bring that, like you've said, you could've just experienced that same thing the night before whenever you're creating. That frustration, maybe.

Stephanie Wiegman: Yeah, exactly. I think, sometimes, students come in the art room. When they are younger

students, they don't edit themselves, which I love about being a teacher, because I really absorb that kind of creativity. I'm like, "Oh woah, they just bounce back from that." As they get older, as you get to first, or second, or third grade, they really start to compare themselves to a peer. Or maybe they're just feeling defeated in another area of their life, and it comes out that, because in an art room, it can be very emotive experience. It's expressive. So, you just really have to have empathy for that and know that's going to be a big part of your job as an art teacher, is making sure you can help them work through those hurdles of creating.

Lisa Baermann: What are some of the skills or lessons that you are trying to accomplish in the elementary school years?

Stephanie Wiegman: We try to pack a lot in. Me and my colleague, Kim Gibson, she's the other art teacher, we talk about this a lot. I think the guiding principle that almost all art teachers use from, whether it's early childhood up to high school, is the elements of art. So those basics: line, shape, color, form. We try to go through each of those throughout the whole year, but then also bringing in different media. I tried to have them do a mix of 2D and 3D, like drawing, painting, ceramics, print making, we just finished the print making unit. So really giving them just a little bit of experience with each of those. So that as they go through their journey here at Concordia, they can build on that. As they go into maybe Middle school or High school, they will have a really good understanding of like, "ok, I really love ceramics, so I want to do this," or "I love to paint, so I want to go on that direction." Kind of just giving them a little bit of everything.

Lisa Baermann: What do you think some of the applications are of having a strong art background later in life, or even during elementary school year and other areas?

Stephanie Wiegman: I think it's really important. I often joke that I wish people just call art teachers "creativity coaches," because it's really about building that toolbox. They might approach a problem in science or math, and if in art class they have learned how to work through creative problem solving or manage regret or mistakes, they will probably be more apt to be more innovative in those subjects as well. So, sometimes people think, "Oh, art classes are about becoming an artist," but no, it's really about developing a tool kit or a toolbox. So, they can carry that with them into all of their other classes. I mean, it's wonderful if they feel inclined towards a creative career, I will of course encourage them to follow those passions, but it's also about learning how to build that creativity muscle. If we can help them with that, they're going to succeed in all their other classes, because you do use creativity in no matter what field you're in.

Lisa Baermann: I think that a lot of people believe that creativity is just kind of defined level, but it is something that you can encourage and massage and build and expand.

Stephanie Wiegman: A lot of times that people would come up to me and say, "oh, you are an artist. I can't draw a stick person." I'm like, yeah, but you are creative, and everyone has that thing, whether it's

cooking, or putting together cool outfit, or designing a room. Even playing a sport takes so much creativity. When you think about all those decisions you make, and you have to make in a short amount of time, and like your spatial awareness, and all of that, goes into so many different things. So, I would just tell people, “You are creative!” That may not mean you are a traditional artist, and a lot of people think that’s drawing realistically, or making some sort of product, but you’re probably very creative in some sort of process in your life. I always teach that to my students, “it’s about the process, not the product. What are you learning along the way, you should really enjoy that journey, because that is the important part.”

Lisa Baermann: While we were preparing for this interview, Suki shared with us that China has now determined that creativity or art classes would become part of the standard curriculum in the educational system here. I thought that was an interesting acknowledgement of the importance of our creative thinking and development.

Stephanie Wiegman: I heard that as well, and I was really excited to hear that, because I think what they beginning to see is, what I mention before, that it’s not just about making a thing or an object. It’s about that skill set. If you go on to the workforce today, everyone is talking about design thinking, innovation, and problem solving, and flexibility. Even think about everything we had to do in the last year because of Covid. How we all had to think so quickly, and differently, creatively. I think people are really beginning to see “this is a skill set, and this is really needed, and you can build off of it. It’s not just this one isolated thing that happen in art studios or art museums. It’s all around us.” It’s very exciting, and I would just encourage parents to take note of that. Try to find things for their child that they’re interested in, that kind of involved their creative muscle.

Lisa Baermann: You mentioned design thinking. What ways does Concordia build or encourage creativity that might be not as obvious as an art class?

Stephanie Wiegman: They do it in a lot of different ways. I mean, we have the maker spaces. That’s a really big place where lots of innovation and creativity happens, and they are using a lot of those creativity prompts to kind of get students to think outside of the box. That’s kind of where the design thinking comes in maybe in a more obvious way, but I do know that teachers are doing that all over the curriculum, whether it’s in social study or science. They are trying to intergrade that model. Also, service learning is a really big piece. That really helps to develop empathy, but you really have to think creatively to solve a problem, or to help someone solve a problem. I would say those are maybe the two biggest areas, but you know, I even see it at recess and getting children to engage different ways of playing. I would even say, in cooking classes, and we have the performative arts. So, I would say it’s all over the place.

Lisa Baermann: What do you want your students to know about you as an artist?

Stephanie Wiegman: Well, I think there’s couple of different ways you can approach that. I mean, there’s the media I

use, or the mediums, and then there's what I make art about, and then maybe why I create the work. On a more formal level, I use mix media, which means that I draw from lots of different areas. It's generally in the two-dimensional realm. So like printmaking, photography, digital drawing, painting, collage... I use all of those media when I create a work of art. As far as subject matter goes, I'm always inspired by moving from point A to point B. The reason why I generalize that is because it could be like moving across the ocean, or taking a daily walk really influence my work. Kind of being aware of the world around you. Or it can be more of an emotional journey, like maybe something you are going through in life, or maybe you change become a new person, and how you can reference that whole journey.

Lisa Baermann: You've talked a little bit about how your art is a reflection of transition or movement or moving from point A to point B as you have described it. Can you share a little bit more about that with us?

Stephanie Wiegman: Sure, so, when I talked about point A to point B, I'm talking about it in very general terms. Because for me, it can be about like a trip across the ocean, or going to a new place, or daily walk, like in your neighborhood. Or even like an emotional journey, so maybe you've encountered a new relationship, or you've gone through something, so you've changed as a person or transition into a new phase of life. So, I really talk about that experience of how we change, based on the places we are part of, and the experiences we've been through.

Lisa Baermann: How has being an expat or living in China impacted your art, and this isn't your first time in China either.

Stephanie Wiegman: I lived in Hangzhou. That's actually where I met my husband. We were both teaching in Hangzhou. We both met the night we get off the plane.

Lisa Baermann: Really? Did he pick you up at the airport?

Stephanie Wiegman: He was friend of the friends who picked me up at the airport.

Lisa Baermann: Really? And you thought, "this might not be so bad"?

Stephanie Wiegman: Yeah, I think I really like China. So, we had a whole year here. It was a really impactful year. I mean, obviously I ended up getting marry at the end of it. I just really fell in love with China. And then we went home, but then we came back about five years later. So, this is my second time in China.

Lisa Baermann: So that is a big part of your art.

Stephanie Wiegman: Yeah, it's a huge part. I think I kind of grew up in China, if that make sense. Obviously, I was here as a young adult, but it was so influential to who I am, even my worldview, and it really

shifted the way I thought about things. I met so many wonderful relationships here, and it's every time I come to China, go back home again, and come back, like my art changes so much. Because I think it's such a big shift. So like, if you kind of go through my art from years ago, it's completely different.

Lisa Baermann: I think you did a piece where it's somebody collecting old vehicles, and it's just that pile stacked high. It's a 6*8 piece. Do you still have that?

Stephanie Wiegman: I sold that one.

Lisa Baermann: Well that is a cool piece!

Stephanie Wiegman: Thank you! Thank you!

Lisa Baermann: Anyway, so that's like a whole different style from now what you are doing with water and mix media of the images and moon. Describe that to me a little bit, like how that changed? How that happened?

Stephanie Wiegman: Sure, I think as an artist, the more you make, you kind of like going through the process of making. Especially if you are doing it every day, you start shifting quite quickly. So, for me, it's a very slow process, but then often people only see the little snapshots. If you saw the bridge in between those two, you'll be like, "oh, ok, I see how she moved to that." But it's kind of hard to see when you see something from 2012 and then to today. I would say what always stay the same was those aspects about the journey. They were about people's stories, my story, and like little snapshots in those stories, whereas I used to maybe put a lot of that information into one piece. Slowly over the years, I started unpacking it, and just taking one out at a time. I think works got more minimal, and focused, and calm as the years have gone on. You know, you are exploring, you want to put everything in there, which is fine. There's nothing wrong with that. But then as I kind of gone through the years, I kind of really want to meditate on just one idea, or maybe one of the experiences.

Lisa Baermann: I feel like that's true in the Sino Art Gallery Show that you did recently.

Stephanie Wiegman: Yeah, that's really true. For that I was really interested in how I could play with the physicality of the paint. Like I was very interested in how I can make them move like water, how can I explore the journey and the medium. And then I did put an image of a boat in each one, but the interesting thing about that series is like I created it while we went back home during Covid, and then we came back through quarantines. I feel like those pieces really went on a physical journey, but I emotionally went on a journey, like we all have in the last year.

Lisa Baermann: So those pieces that you show are quite large. I don't know the actual dimensions.

Stephanie Wiegman: They ranged in size. Some are a meter by meter; some are like maybe a meter and half by a meter.

Lisa Baermann: What I learned in watching another artist, who did large pieces, is that actually have to have a large location to do that type of stuff. And that never really occur to me that if you're going to make a large mural, you have to have a big space to do this. So, what was your space? I know that you have a couple interesting tools that you used during this process, would you share that with us?

Stephanie Wiegman: Yeah, I'd love to. So, the first place where I started to making the work was at my parents' house, because that's where we stayed during Covid. I was like, "ok, I'm just going to paint in the backyard." My parents lived out in the countryside, and they have a huge acre that I can spread the paintings out on. I bought this giant roll of canvas. I think it was like a hundred and seven-five feet long. I just cut it into sections and lay them out in the backyard. And I used the garden hose, and like brooms and mops. I just went to the paint section of the hardware store and got like the big palette knives. I wanted to use really big tools and household tools. I even used the weather. So, I would leave them outside when it was raining to see how that would influence the paint. And it's a bit of a different way of painting, it's more like stained painting, because I used raw canvas, and then you use a special paint to stain the canvas. Traditionally, you can leave an oil paint painting outside, that wouldn't be good, but for this is different, I can be a little bit more playful.

Lisa Baermann: One of the pieces that I noticed was called "A Star to Stare by." Is there a back story on that? What motivated you? Or what brought you to that place to create that piece?

Stephanie Wiegman: So, when I was creating in the backyard, I was really paying attention to what was happening with the paint, and what it remained me of. And then there's this one piece that I started to stare by, where it almost looked like a galaxy. I can see the flex of paint, and that feels like stars, milky way. Then when things were settled and dried, I did some sketches, where I was working with the composition. What it really spoke to me is that I was really looking out at this big expanse. So, I really wanted the viewers to go on that journey with me. So, when I put the boat in the painting, I placed it so like the person can almost like climb into the boat. I want to create that orientation of "ok, let's go," and like also that sense of being odd, in front of something big, wonderful, also maybe a little scary. That's how I think it's feeling last year. So, that painting, interestingly enough, went with me to the US. I packed it up, and you know, it came back with me. It got a pleased escort to quarantine. And it was at the quarantine hotel, and then it was at my home in Shanghai, and I worked on it through the whole quarantine. It was a very therapeutic experience, I think, for me. This painting really went with me on that whole journey.

Lisa Baermann: What is it like to show in China? And I think this wasn't your first show either. You've done other gallery shows.

Stephanie Wiegman: Yeah, this was my third one. I had two the previous year. I think initially, getting into the art scene was a really big mountain to climb. Mostly because I don't speak Mandarin very well. And it's such a big city. So it's hard. And you are teaching full-time. So, something I kind of did very slowly and thoughtfully, but once I did arrive that place where I got the opportunities. It felt really amazing to be able to share this with this community, in this city, in this place that I love so much. So, it was a real honor that people want to show a foreigner's work. They would be willing to give me a space, and a platform to do that. It kind of felt like one of those moments in your career like, "wow. I got show in Shanghai! In Guangzhou!" You don't think about that when you are eighteen years old, making art in your mom's basement, you know. So it's like this very beautiful full circle moment, and it's just a really nice way to be part of the community in a different way. I love my Concordia community so much, but it's also really cool to meet the art community here in Shanghai.

Lisa Baermann: You mentioned making art in your mother's basement. What was it like to develop that love of art in your life as a child?

Stephanie Wiegman: My parents really nurtured that in me. I think they knew early on, "ok, Stephanie is kind of like a highly sensitive child." I was very emotional, and I was always creating something, seems to always express myself in that way. So, I think they are like, "ok, she's a visual learner, and this is what brings her a lot of joy." So, they would give me the material and the space to create. They take me to workshop, or things like that, where I can explore it more. They really just encouraged me through that process. And I think as you go through school, you might get praised, or might be encouraged in that way by a teacher again. So, it kind of kept getting solidified within me. "Ok, this is really a part of who I am, and I want to explore it." So, by the time I get to college, I pretty much knew that's what I was going to do.

Lisa Baermann: You've had some pretty cool experiences as an artist. I know you did some work in Italy, or you did some schooling in Italy.

Stephanie Wiegman: Yeah, schooling. I went to school in Florence, Italy for a year, and that was a huge year in my life. These amazing professors that really kind of set me on the path that I'm now, encouraged me to get my Master in fine arts, and I got into printmaking. So, it was just a really beautiful year.

Lisa Baermann: Yeah, I can imagine, studying art in Florence.

Stephanie Wiegman: It was the dreamiest year.

Lisa Baermann: Are there other experiences that have been impactful in your life and bringing you to the artist you are today?

Stephanie Wiegman: I think my schooling was a big part of that. Just going through college, you know, having professors who show you what it meant to get up every day and commit to making. I remember how this professor in college, like his studio was right across the art painting studio. After he teach class, he goes in paint. So, we saw like, “everyday, ok, he’s doing this every day. This is something you need to keep up.” That really stuck with me. That year in Italy was huge. When I got to my master’s program, that’s when I think I was really challenged. That was like a hard two years, you kind of have to take everything you learned and throw it out the window, because they required you to defend your work and really push it to the limits. So, I think I really grew a lot during those two years, too.

Lisa Baermann: You also were in Artist-in-Residence at the Pfister Hotel in Milwaukee. Can you share a little bit about your artwork at that point? And how it was to be selected for that honor?

Stephanie Wiegman: Sure! It actually relates back to China. So, Zach and I were in Hangzhou, China, and then we came home, got married. And I applied for that residency right away with a body of work that was actually about China, and about our year there. They really love the idea of journey and travel, because obviously their hotel had over a million travelers come in and out every year. So, they gallery lend me a gallery space for whole year, and I got to interact with the guests. I would go there and paint every day and talk to them and exhibit my works. That was a really good year just for developing myself more professionally as an artist. I had to learn all about marketing and putting myself out there.

Lisa Baermann: You said somewhere, I read, that you as an artist really changed when you started to think about your business in addition to be an artist.

Stephanie Wiegman: Yeah, because it is kind of like two different ways of thinking, almost. And I would have to say, if I’m answering this honestly, it’s a huge struggle. Because I went to school to learn how to paint and to hold that craft. I didn’t learn about, like bookkeeping or marketing. So, I would always just look out to people who were able to do that, and so I reached out to them. In the Pfister, they had a whole marketing team, so they were really great.

Lisa Baermann: Oh, they kind of set you up then.

Stephanie Wiegman: Yeah, they helped me, and so I kind of learned more about that world. But, I would say, for artists, probably the most difficult part is figuring out how to share and elevate their work and put it out there in the world.

Lisa Baermann: You don’t have the term “starting artist” for no reason.

Stephanie Wiegman: Yeah, I think it’s really hard, because, you know, a lot of times people don’t get that training. And

you get out as a young twentysomething, and you are like, “ok, I’m going to paint. How am I going to sell?” I said, “no! With anything. If you are making t-shirts, or making pies, or whatever you are making. You have to know how to run a business.”

Lisa Baermann: So, you have really kind of hit it in Milwaukee, but then, I think, you had this calling back to China, and you met someone, who kind of encouraged you, and that was ----

Stephanie Wiegman: Klammer, yeah! The AP Art teacher here. So, Zach and I had been looking at Concordia for a while. In addition to be an artist, I would also an adjunct professor, so I would teach a couple classes there at local colleges and universities. I always thought maybe I want to go back to the classroom full-time, but I wasn't sure in my capacity. But then Zach got a job at Concordia, and we always say if we got a job, even if it's just one of us, we would go. And Jane Klammer was really central to that. I just emailed her, and she happened to be in Chicago, and we lived in Milwaukee. That weekend was so weird. And we ended up talking, I think, 5 or 6 hours. We went off for dinner, and we went around Chicago, and I was like, “oh, man, these people were so great! This seems like such a great community.” So, about a year and half later, we ended up back in China.

Lisa Baermann: So there’s all these kinds of everyday challenges. I mean we see it on Facebook, see it on Instagram. And I think YOU right now are in the midst of a cool one, and it’s a everyday art challenge. So, I was actually looking at my Instagram account, and yesterday’s picture, I just love it! I think it’s great, and then I flipped through it, and I saw there’s a poem attached to it. Well, that’s written by LeeAnne Lavendar, and she’s on an everyday poetry challenge. I just don’t even know how do you come up with stuff every day? And what does that do for you? Why is that important? What does it bring to your work?

Stephanie Wiegman: Yeah, I mean, showing up every day is difficult. There are definitely days I’m like, “why did I do this...” But, I think it’s that working through that, like what we talked about earlier, working through that hurdle, and getting over it. And there’s going to be days like you make something that you’re like, “ugh, I don’t like it very much.” But it’s the active making that really kind of sharpens your skills over the long haul. Maybe you make twenty things, and you only like two, but those two are like, you really love them, or you really had a lightbulb, or ah ha moment with them. So, like that quantity of making really hones creativity. It really helps! I always tell my students that it’s no really so much about the quality. I mean, you want to put your best effort for it. But if you are making every day, you will find something that you love.

Lisa Baermann: We touched on this before, I guess, in an interview that I read with you, it says, showing up, you know that you would show up every day from nine in the morning, eight in the morning, to whatever time at night in end. That is work hours. I think it’s the same idea that here is the everyday art challenge. Just make yourself do it. I guess that sticktoitiveness , is really what how you get somewhere in the end.

Stephanie Wiegman: Yeah, I think, just also like, putting that first. I think as teacher, sometimes I mean you are really tired at the end of the day. I think having those routines, whether it's going for a walk, or working out, or making art for an hour, that really helps to balance you out and fill up your cups. So you can give more to your students. I feel like, when I'm creating, every day, as I'm a better art teacher. I know that might seem counter intuitive, because people will be like, "how do you have the time?" But I know if I'm doing that, then I'm kind of satisfied in my creative life, so I can bring more to the classroom.

Lisa Baermann: You recently did a show, so to speak, here at Concordia, of your students' artwork. I felt it was so cool. It was right outside my office. I think it was made from recycled items, and then the children had wrapped them in paper mâché to create ----

Stephanie Wiegman: It looked like an entire zoo. It was about endangered animals or maybe animals whose habitat was in danger. So they really got to choose that, and research it. Ms. Toner brought in a bunch of books about it, and they got to go through them. So, I took them through the whole design process. It's almost like a six-week project. They had to start with thumbnails, sketches, and then they had to build the infrastructures, and go to the maker space to see like, "oh, how can this laundry detergent bubble turn into a dinosaur." And then we went through the paper mâché for couple cycles, and then they had to paint it and to add details. It was really involved. As a reflection exercise, they also created a print, or like a drawing of the animal, which we exhibited with the piece as well.

Lisa Baermann: There's a lot cross learning. I didn't realize that all one in, there's the librarian, makerspace, and it seems like you even have the sustainability goal involves in there.

Stephanie Wiegman: Yeah, definitely. Ms. Gibson, the other art teacher, and I always try to intergrade the other curriculum into our art room. Just to really short up their learning in other areas at school. It was really fun. They are second graders, so they love that they got to exhibit it kind of over in the high school, or the big kids' gallery. They actually got to be the curators for a day. I took them over there, and they had those little clipboards, planning out where to put things. We talked about what it meant to be a curator. So they learned a lot during that process.

Lisa Baermann: We enjoyed that show! We enjoyed these whole last few weeks has been different shows in a sense for different age levels, and it's been super fun to see you all and different art that's coming out of, and to learn about the processes behind them.

Stephanie Wiegman: Yeah, you know, Jane Klammer put up here AP show at the end of it, which is one of my favorite shows. To see what they have been working on all their years at Concordia. It was wonderful.

Lisa Baermann: I hope you have more coming. It brightened our days.

Stephanie Wiegman: Sure, definitely.

Lisa Baermann: So, as parents, what can we do to encourage our children's creativity?

Stephanie Wiegman: There's a lot of different things you can do. It can be as simple as when they bring their art home, instead of using value-based statements. For example, they bring you a piece of art, and you say, "oh, that's beautiful." That's ok to say, don't feel like you are messing up their creativity process, but go deeper. Say like, "can you explain to me the story behind this?" or "why did you use red here but blue over here?" Or even things like, "Is there anything you would change about the way you made this?" or "what's something you want to do differently next time?" That get the kids to think critically about their work in a constructive way. So, really engaging them more in the conversation of creativity and how they created it.

Lisa Baermann: What'd you say to your child when what they are trying to accomplish just isn't realized in the product that they produced.

Stephanie Wiegman: I mean, that can be really disappointing, and we talked about it a lot in our art class. I kind of talking a lot about making mistakes before the mistake happens, so they know how to manage that. When you make a mistake, sometimes it can be a happy accident, like it leads you to another path of discovery. Maybe you can even cut that piece out. Maybe this now, instead of this painting being something that you want to finish. It can be a collage paper that we can cut up and glued into something else. We can make some flowers out of it. Showing them that, just because the vision in their head isn't lining up with what's happening on the page, doesn't mean that all is lost. That's a huge thing about creativity, is that when you start out as an artist, you have a vision, and then you make it, and you're like, "that is horrible! I am a horrible artist!! Why did I go into this!" So, it's about the consistency and practice, because one day, your imagination will catch up with you. You will make the thing that's in your head on the page. There are some interviews. There's one with Eric Glass, he does this American live and talks about that. He did a whole podcast about that and encourages people to investigate that. He talked about the vision in your head not lining up with what's on the page, but really it's more about you will get there. You just have to put in the hours.

Lisa Baermann: What can parents physically do at home to encourage creativity?

Stephanie Wiegman: I think just having a space. You know, if you live in a small apartment, it can just even be a box with all of their tools in it, and they know they can bring it anywhere in the house. Kind of keeping that stock with different art supplies. Or even have a bin, like what we have here in the maker space like egg cartons and recyclable materials, old scraps of clock. I know my mom growing up, she was a seamstress, and she would sow things. She just had this huge box of remnants and buttons. When people asking about my childhood, that's one of my best memories

– the junk box.

Lisa Baermann: What you can put all together. It was funny that my mom, you know she has grandchildren, our kids, and she collects stuff too. She would collect lids to milk jugs, and then she would bring these big bags out. My kids, you should hear about them saying this as an adult, “what was she doing?...” But she sure did make an impact.

Stephanie Wiegman: She’s encouraging creativity. What we have something here: we have free choice Friday. So, maybe once every three to four weeks, each classroom gets a free choice Friday. It’s essentially us bring out all these loose parts, and there’s actually a lot of science and research on loose parts. We used them a lot on the early childhood. It really helps with decision making, and it’s the kids’ favorite day in the art room. They are like, “when’s free choice Friday? When’s our next free choice Friday?” It is just using those little bits and pieces, and I have children who built an entire city. Some would make bow and arrow. Someone made a dress, last week in my class, out of tissue paper. So, it’s just a really great time for them to really explore their ideas and with different materials.

Lisa Baermann: So just having that in a space for them or in a box, just so that they have access to it.

Stephanie Wiegman: Yeah, they have access, and they know it’s there. It’s important. You can lead them to that, when you hear those words like “I’m bored,” “I don’t know what to do.” Let’s go through that together. I also think just taking walks, or just going out into the city, or the neighborhood, or the gardens, with the intention of making, like bring a sketchbook, or collecting things, or photographing things. Children really love that. It kind of gives the experience to draw on. As an artist, I do that all the time. Like when I’m creatively blocked, I would go for a walk, and it really helps. It’s also a great time to build your relationship with your child, to just taking the time to be together.

Lisa Baermann: Could you walk us through a conversation a parent could have with a child about their artwork?

Stephanie Wiegman: Yeah, so, let’s say your child brings home something from free choice Friday, and you’re like, “what is that???” So, maybe instead of saying, “what is that,” saying “ok, could you tell me about this. Tell me the process of making.” So, you use clay, why do you choose green clay. What are all these little pieces over here? Why did you gather these little buttons in the corner? Were you frustrated during the process? Was it frustrating when that piece fell off? What did you do? Did you glue it back on? How did you reattach it? Where do you want to display this? What you want to add to this? Should we draw a picture of what you just made? All those things help them to reflect on that process of making. You will be really surprised, when I do this in the art room, you look at it and think, “ok, this is couple clumps of clay, some buttons.” But when you hear their stories, you know, I had one child, he said, “this is an island community. And this is the Island of Fire. This is the Island of the Tall Trees. This is where the monsters live.” Yeah, this is a whole story. Maybe you could sit down and be like, “ok, let’s write out that story.” It’s really a

way for them to get out all those narratives. Even asking them the emotions they felt while they are making. I think it's a really good conversation to have. That also might open the door for other conversations.

Lisa Baermann: Well as a parent that has tubs and tubs and tubs of artwork, what do you say? How do you deal with all that? Is it ok to let it go?

Stephanie Wiegman: It is ok to let it go, and also having the child be part of that process. Being like, "hey, we don't have a lot of space. What artist would do is usually photograph their work, and then they create a portfolio. Can we photograph the work together and create a portfolio?" Then maybe we can repurpose some of these. Especially when they are coming home with big projects or things like that. I mean, if it's just a drawing, maybe just putting into a folder, or scanning it and creating a little file on your desktop that they can go through. A lot of times, even in the art room, we think, kids are more attached to their work than they really are. Often, when you are like, "oh, you can take home your work." and they are like, "oh no, it's fine. You can keep it."

Lisa Baermann: "My mom doesn't want it."

Stephanie Wiegman: They are like, "It's fine. I had fun making it." Or "I'm going to cut it up and make it into something else." They are not as precious about it as we think they are. I mean, sometimes they are. Sometimes, they are like, "I want to take this home. I want to put it on my bedside table and look at it." I think we really need to honor those moments, but I don't think you need to feel like you need to keep everything. Make them part of the process.

Lisa Baermann: What do you think are the barriers to creativity.

Stephanie Wiegman: I always say the big two, for me, are perfectionism and the fear of failing. It's ok to have fear through the creative process, but letting it prevent you from making, because you are afraid that it's not going to be perfect. I think that's what I see the most with students of any age. They just fear that it's not going to be good enough.

Lisa Baermann: Isn't there a point in a child's life, where they've been doing these types of things, and then all of a sudden, either there was a realization that it's not as good as they found it was. How do you get them pass that hump, in a sense, so that they continue?

Stephanie Wiegman: Well, I think, there's a couple things. I think you have to think about if it's just the medium they are using. If you put clay in front of me, I will be like, "it's not my forte." So, maybe like, switching that up, like giving them different tools. Maybe they would rather build with hammer and nails, but they maybe not want to be painting or doing weaving or something. So, switching that up. If it's more like a deeper issue, where they feel like they failed, or like they are not good at things, then I think you really need to open up that conversation and talk about what are they

feeling? Why do they think it's not good enough? Maybe it's they are comparing themselves to someone in class, or maybe someone said something. I know, a lot of us heard of Brené Brown, and she talks about art scars. A lot of us have them. A lot of the clients she talked or the data she gathered was really high, 70–80%. They had some sort of scars that attached to creativity that kind of kept them from moving through, or maybe taking other risks in life, or being vulnerable. And it's usually things like, people say like, "that's bad", or "that horse looks stupid. It looks like a dog." Something very simple like that. Or someone just tells them they are bad singers. People really carry that with them. So, kind of getting the rude of that, and talking about how you can move through that, and let's try some different things.

Lisa Baermann: As an educator, what are some of the hurdles you have to climb over to help people understand the importance of art in the classroom?

Stephanie Wiegman: It's really getting away from that idea of the product. I think that's the biggest one. It's about the process and building those skills and developing that toolbox. It's kind of like what I said earlier that I would rather be called a "creativity coach." I really hope that people understand that we are trying to give your child the tools they need, to be more creative in every aspect of their life. Not just make a pretty painting, or a really cool sculpture. I mean, although that's part of it, art is just one of those vehicles that you can use to hone your creative craft. I think the other thing is that art takes a lot of time, so not to rush that, and make time for that in the school day, or whether it's at home. I think, often with art, at least in the US, maybe it's not as well funded as other programs, or maybe not given as much time. There is a lot to fit in during a day.

Lisa Baermann: We are really blessed with multiple art teachers, phenomenal facilities and supplies.

Stephanie Wiegman: It's amazing. That's what I said, in the US, I was always up against that. So, when we were coming here, it's really amazing to have the supplies and supports, and to see how it's being intergraded, and the time. How much time the children have to create during the school day. I will say one more thing, often time people think, if you are in an art class, then you have to become an artist. That's the end goal. Well, I say, no. It's about what kind of other path that will lead you down. Creative careers are viable careers, and there's that stereotypes that, "artists don't make money", or things like that. But I know I lots of artists who do or who are in a creative career. They are art directors, architects, graphic designers... You should encourage that in your child, because they will find the right path for them, and it could be a very successful one, because they're following something they really care about.

Lisa Baermann: For those students who are so passionate about art, that they really would like to become an artist. What kind of words of wisdom do you have for them?

Stephanie Wiegman: I would say, consistency is key. So, show up. It doesn't have to be every day but show up when you can to practice. Go easy on yourself, don't be too hard on yourself. Give yourself that room

to make mistakes. Try new things, really explore. I would say, find an art community. So, if you go to an art school, it's kind of naturally build in. Just going to art shows, gallery shows, meeting other artists, and people who can maybe mentor you in that field. And kind of lastly, the things we talked about earlier with like, the vision in your head won't always line up with what's on the page or what's in front of you. So, just be patient with yourself. It's like a slow and steady process, and just show up, and practice, and you will get there.

Lisa Baermann: I think that's a really great place to stop. Thanks for coming and being with us today. I appreciate it.

Stephanie Wiegman: Thank you! I really enjoyed our conversation.

Lisa Baermann: It was nice.