



Photos by Katherine Lacaze

**ABOVE:** A copy of a work by Leonardo da Vinci that Deborah Stenberg painted during an undergraduate course at the Academy of Art University in San Francisco. **RIGHT:** Stenberg works on a painting at her studio in Astoria.

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instruction books about decorative paintings and taught at conventions throughout the U.S.

However, she continually found herself longing to teach college students.

“I really wanted to get those students who are seeking a career. They’re making life choices and deciding, ‘How am I going to make it in the art world?’” she said.

In the early 2000s, after earning a master’s in fine arts degree, Stenberg started teaching as an adjunct professor at the University of Alaska’s campus in Kodiak, where her husband Bill was stationed with the U.S. Coast Guard. She eventually became a full-time professor.

When it came time to move, Stenberg asked if she could continue teaching courses remotely. She felt confident that she could develop an online course for studio art. Although the administration was initially skeptical, they took a chance.

“It opened the door for being able to offer all these people in little remote Alaskan villages the ability to take a studio art class, whereas they never had that,” she said.

### Ahead of the curve

Fast forward to 2020, when the coronavirus pandemic turned remote learning into the new normal, Stenberg felt comfortably ahead of the curve. She was teaching at Brookhaven College in Dallas, Texas, when the pandemic threw the university into a tailspin.

Stenberg underwent a quick, intense educational training to teach her fellow professors how to lead their studio art classes online and help them create their own course curriculum. Although remote courses are more time-consuming and less effectual than in-person classes, Stenberg believes there is value in continuing to provide opportunities of all kinds to students.

In Astoria, where Stenberg and her husband have settled into their “forever home,” she continues to teach seven courses between two universities in Alaska and Texas. She is also leading workshops and giving private lessons. Course subjects range from drawing to watercolor and oil painting to color theory and art appreciation.

She also likes instructing students in the business side of art. There are numer-



ous steps a person must follow to become professional, self-supported artist: entering shows, being featured in publications, selling artwork, winning awards and getting into galleries.

“You can’t just go out there and expect to be discovered — it’s not going to happen,” she said. “It’s hard to stand out anymore.”

Stenberg helps her students explore via-

ble options to make a living while building their portfolio and reputation. She also encourages them to explore and take classes from multiple people.

“I always emphasize, ‘You’re learning the Debbie Stenberg technique of art,’” she said. “My teaching philosophy is the more people you take lessons from, the better exposure you’re going to be getting to the art world.”