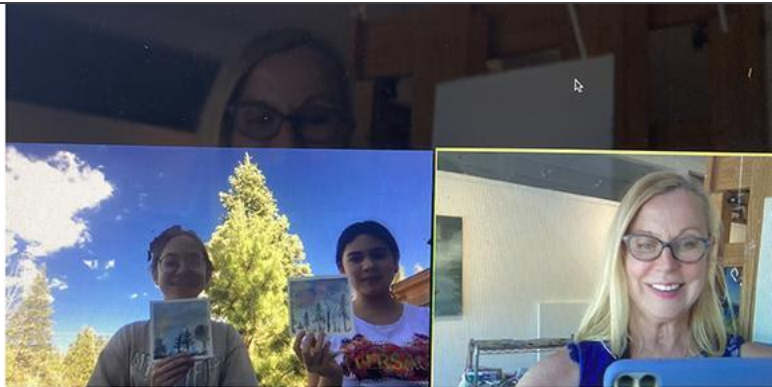


Welcome to Arc Studios News! This newsletter features events and activities of artists, nonprofit professionals and micro business owners that are part of the creative community at Arc Studios & Gallery 1246 Folsom Street San Francisco.

## Arc Studios News July 2020

### A Conversation with Debra Cook Shapiro Arc Studio #205

By Sherri Cornett



Painter and art instructor Debra Shapiro learned to meet virtually through Zoom several years ago when she joined a mastermind art business and marketing group, but it was not until the Covid-19 stay-at-home orders that she began using it to keep her students painting. In our conversation, she shared the highlights and challenges of this new way of teaching.

**Sherri Cornett:** Before we get into all things Zoom . . . would you tell me a bit about your painting?

**Debra Shapiro:** Of course! Figures in the landscape are my primary focus, particularly teens and young adults, who seem to have a natural sense of freedom and movement when they are in nature. I work from photos that capture candid moments and like to fragment the images and use texture and expressive brush strokes to show multiple views, convey passage of time, explore narratives and create an emotional pull.

**SC:** This interest in younger folks carries over to your art lessons and workshops.

**DS:** Yes. I hold a degree in elementary education and, fifteen years ago, I began art classes with children. Then, when empty-nest parents began looking for ways to return to art, I added them to weekly studio classes. It was thrilling to see their progress in person, in my studio!

**SC:** Then Covid-19 happened. How did the transition to Zoom-based classes go?

**DS:** The learning curve of broken connections and garbled sounds made it challenging and frustrating, but helped me live with imperfections. So, there are new things to figure out almost daily and also positives. Luckily, I haven't been Zoombombed! I provide passwords and am looking into using the waiting room option, which gives me control of who joins the session. And, then there is my face on screen . . . how do other Zoom instructors look so

pulled together? Who does their hair!? I continue to try, because I want to keep students engaged and progressing toward their goals of becoming accomplished painters.

**SC:** How do you set up the technology and materials?

**DS:** The students focus their cameras on their work. They can also text me images for critiques. Having another camera, monitor, and a microphone would help on my end, but for now my desktop computer screen and its camera provide a view of my easel and table for demos. I give feedback while they are working or text them later. We also have group critiques. Screen sharing offers a wonderful opportunity to share their work with others. In my in-person classes, I provided materials to new students. Since deliveries from art stores are so slow now, I am mailing them materials from my own supply - pencils, charcoal, paint, canvases, even a table top easel. It feels good to be able to share.

**SC:** Do you miss seeing your students' faces in person?

**DS:** Yes, but there have been some unexpected levels of connections. Since zoom teaching will probably be a new normal, I am trying to make this electronic experience as personal as possible. Having them share views of their home spaces with me gives me a quick insight and new reference points from which to ask about their lives, to go deeper with them. I see what art they hang in their walls, what colors they like in their spaces. I Zoomed with a beginner, a seventy-year-old man, who wanted to paint his ailing, seventeen-year-old cat. I could see the love he has for the animal while he was on screen. My Zoom sessions with him felt like true visits.

**SC:** How else has Zoom changed the way you teach?

**DS:** I used to also offer field trips. Now the students have been sharing tours of their work or studios in our group sessions. One student found a pair of baby shoes in an old box. We helped her memorialize them by watching her set up the painting and discussing lighting and color with her. I think they are happy to be transferring the skills and habits they developed in my studio classes to their home studio environments. I am generous with referrals to other online teachers and programs when there is a perfect fit for the student, to help them get to where they want or need to go. I hope they will find my commitment to their learning helpful and a safe space to experiment and ask for guidance.

**SC:** On the whole, you sound very positive about this change in teaching.

**DS:** There have been lots of sweet moments and my students have encouraged me to think of new ways of teaching. One student is a seven-year-old girl, whose brothers had been in my classes. Due to her age, remote teaching could have been daunting, but she was an excellent listener and careful with her paint. She challenged me to be articulate and concise in my instruction. After I showed her photos in a book and read to her Georgia O'Keefe's writing about paint being like music, she didn't hesitate to start making large swirling brush marks and then proudly added her flower paintings to the wall of her home with her brothers' works.

A fourteen-year-old student is brimming with ideas about creating an illustrated book for teens. I ordered twelve small canvases to be delivered to her so she can paint original art all in the same format and look at the pieces together. She may self-publish at the end of this!

**SC:** Anything else you are considering for your online classes?

**DS:** Lots! I had an in-studio happy hour in February and plan to do a smaller, socially-distanced outdoor version . . . and make a video series of these kinds of events. I want to do

a Zoom visit of the David Park exhibit at SFMOMA to create lessons and homework activities based on his work . . . and private and semi-private lessons in person. Perhaps a demo of a real-life painting session by a student painting a San Francisco landscape, which would be helpful and fun for the other students. And . . . an outdoor, socially-distanced painting event, and a picnic for teens . . . I think it is exciting to teach in a new way and to explore my own creativity and resilience.

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