

***Featured Artist of the Month
Kelly Benson***

Kelly Benson's life for the past 35 years offers another example of the positive power of art. She is the AAOS Artist of the Month for March.

Kelly was a realtor and her husband, Steve, the chef at a Napa Valley, CA, winery in 1990 when major health issues rendered her essentially disabled and bedridden. She jokes today that a seriously compromised immune system forced her to begin "practicing social distancing more than 30 years ago". Back then, it didn't take long for isolation and boredom to lead her to ask Steve to get her a pad and some colored pencils, and she began sketching things she could see from her bedroom window.



She slowly progressed, developing her style of fine detail she describes as realism, although not to the level of "hyper photo realism." After finding that "I suck at watercolor," the success she encountered with acrylics invigorated her artistic career. She is completely self-taught.

The couple left California for the Northwest, and in 1998, Steve and his brother launched a fine dining restaurant in Poulsbo, WA. Kelly painted a series of 3'x3' botanicals to decorate the space and one night, a customer asked the manager if the paintings were for sale.

She had never sold any of her art. She wasn't sure of a price but told the manager \$1200. He called back to say the man had pulled out 12 crisp hundred dollar bills and left smiling with the painting.



Kelly became a commercial artist, moved to oil painting in 2013, and after almost a quarter-century, has never put her work in any gallery. She does commissions, pieces for friends, and paints for personal enjoyment. Her work includes animals, still life, and "just about anything except portraits." Her biggest project was a 24-foot oil triptych of an orchid spray, that took nine months to complete and was done for a commercial building.



Since the Bensons moved to Seattle in 1991, they have frequently vacationed in Ocean Shores. "We knew we would retire here," she said, and that came true in 2016. En route, they lived in Charleston, SC ("beautiful area but never could do the heat"), then back to Washington, specifically Port Townsend, then Silverdale.

She now works exclusively in oils, and generally in smaller formats, although she currently has a 28"x24" heron on her easel. She has a good eye for other applications as well, for example, painting botanicals on old, refurbished wooden trays and ceramic tiles. And she still does commissioned artwork. With her health issues still necessitating some level of social distancing, she plans to make her art more accessible by launching her own website soon.