



Close-up of a modern surf painting by Quartz Hill artist Joanne Benites Maldonado.

"There is an abundance of artists up here, and all the people are just wonderful."

Benites Maldonado specializes in pastels and oils, but also works in graphite (pencil) and watercolor.

At San Fernando High School, her main interest was fine art. She took art classes at Los Angeles Mission College and Los Angeles City College, and took classes on her own from several top artists, including Neil Boyle and Lance Richlin.

"Although I have done more than portraits, I paid money for those portrait classes so that's where my work is centered," she said with a smile.

"I felt that because portraiture is very involved, if I could do portraits, I could also do landscapes or desert scenes. Unfortunately, I started painting first, and then drawing."

Richlin told her that to progress in portraiture, she had to learn drawing.

"I took his advice. After learning drawing, my painting improved 100%," Benites Maldonado said. "My homework was doing hundreds of drawings of people."

She said she wanted to experience different aspects of art earlier in her career because she wasn't sure of which direction to go.

At one point in her career, she wanted to do murals. She joined up with a mural crew in Los Angeles whose members used spray cans, not brushes.

"They let me do the lettering," she said.

Then came the mural "Freedom Forward," displayed at the Jewish Community Center in Van Nuys. She

worked with Chicago muralist John Pittman.

"He was an expert at designing murals, but he was a hard person to work with," Benites Maldonado said. "I learned from him, but probably the most important thing I learned was that murals were not for me—long hours in the heat of summer, trying to move and balance on scaffolding.

"It was a good experience, but I wouldn't like to repeat it."

Benites Maldonado's studio is contained in a front room of her Quartz

"I like it that she gets pleasure out of her art, and she's so good at it that other people enjoy it as well."

—Richard Maldonado

Hill home—her retreat.

Richard said when things are going great for her, she's in the room for hours at a time.

"I will hardly see her for days when everything's going right," he said. "But if things start going wrong, if she gets frustrated, she needs time away from the room.

"I tell her to leave it alone, walk away for a while, then get a fresh look at it. Sometimes it's all she needs to do."

Richard said that he's "proud as heck of her."

"I like it that she gets pleasure out of her art, and she's so good at