

he said.

Recently, Benites Maldonado had three surfing-related pieces on display at the Lancaster Museum and Art Gallery for the "Good Times, Good Tunes and Legendary Boards" exhibit that also honored the late musician Frank Zappa, who graduated from Antelope Valley High School in 1958.

"I was asked to do some pieces that had to do with surfers and surfboards, so I had to do some research," she said. "It was fun to do."

One of the pieces, a watercolor in black and white, shows circa 1960s surfers running out into the surf; a second, done in pastels, shows a windsurfer upside down as a wave closes down; the third is a colorful and vibrant oil painting that shows a female surfing competitor making a turn on a wave.

"It was a good challenge to see what I could come up with," Benites Maldonado said.

She said once she had painted for 25 years, she felt she was getting a good grasp on it.

"The last 10 years I feel I'm able to paint whatever I want," she said.

The toughest disciplines she finds in painting are building and blending.

She said a teacher told her that although most people see a painting as two-dimensional—height and width—like a photo, it's actually

and depth—because there are layers underneath that people don't see.

"A turning point for me came as I was building up a cheek," Benites Maldonado said. "As I was getting more and more into the cheek, the whole room disappeared. All I saw were the colors—I was in the painting.

"Once I finished and stood back, only then could I see the room.

"Many viewers only see the result of building and blending, not the steps to get it there," she said.

"There are a series of smaller paintings within a painting," said Benites Maldonado. "Each step you take is a step toward a finished painting, yet it is a painting in itself."

She told of a time she struggled with the corner of the mouth in a portrait. No matter how hard she tried, she couldn't get it right.

"The teacher told me to leave the corner alone and to correct everything around it," she said. "I did it, and the corner turned out fine."

Benites Maldonado said she's excited about her new artist friends and her new community. She's hoping to find new subjects to paint, be they portraits or landscapes.

"Each painting becomes a friend. I'm surrounded by them," she said. "They're like members of the family. But like other members, they grow up and go away.

"It's important to be ready for the next change and to welcome it."



Top, close-up of a surf painting titled "Gidget." Bottom, pastel, titled "Aloha Smile."