Gae Siadous is a self-taught artist whose work is as prolific as it is varied. From commissioned portraits to abstract art, Siadous does not seem to wait long for inspiration—it just keeps coming.

The 45-year-old mother of three children taught herself to paint by studying books on tole painting—a decorative art introduced by Pennsylvania Dutch settlers. The folk art includes simple designs using hearts, doves and other patterns.

"I started at page one and painted everything in the book," Siadous said. "But I'm fickle and I get bored easily, I have to be constantly challenged."

While she was developing her own natural brushstroke, Siadous studied the paintings of such famous artists as Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec and Mary Cassatt.

"I fell in love with Toulouse-Lautrec's paintings of dance hall girls and I started painting different versions of a woman I came to call 'Ruby,'" she said.

"Ruby launched my 'Belle Acadienne' series. I took the enthusiasm for my work inspired by Toulouse-Lautrec and put it into an area that touched my heart and that was the beautiful dark-haired, dark-eyed Acadian woman."

The Belle Acadienne paintings are soft portrayals of women who usually are dressed in an indigo skirt with a loose white blouse. They often wear an old-fashioned bonnet and black stockings or they are barefoot, gathering cane or playing the Cajun fiddle.

Some of the belles are a reflection of their prototype, Ruby, who has more in her of the showgirl and less of earthy Cajun simplicity—they are a little hard around the edges and look out from the canvas with a knowing expression.

This may explain the audience most enamored by Siadous' work. "At least 95 percent of my buyers are men," she said. "I think that's funny, because I am a feminist painter. I've only painted one male figure and he was a grandfather."

Siadous continues to paint the belles, but she has again reached for new subjects to stimulate her creative drive.

She has begun to paint children and credits a love of Mary Cassatt's paintings for some of her inspiration.

"Children have become the focal point of what I'm doing now," she said. "I really love Mary Cassatt's painting. She was the only American female among the impressionists."

Siadous paints commissioned portraits of local children, but she does not seem to view her work as a by-the-dollar creation.

"I love what I do for free," she said. "If I see a pretty child, a child that I want to paint, I'll do it."

Artist Gae Siadous makes final touch-ups in pencil (right and below). Siadous, a self-taught artist, learned to paint by studying books on tole painting.
whether the parents can pay for it or not. I've given away a lot of my work."

The belles and children's portraits still are not enough to document Siadous' energy. She also has created a number of abstract paintings that sometimes incorporate such various textures as lace paper, silk and cord.

Siadous became a full-time artist in 1976, when she gave up nursing. She typically works from 10 a.m. until 5 p.m. every day, without stopping to eat or drink.

She is a lifelong resident of Acadia and is a direct descendant of both General Alfred Mouton and Fermin Breaux, the founder of Breaux Bridge.

She was raised by her father, Allen Breaux, after his wife died when Siadous was only three years old.

"Ten days after my mother's death, my father had to be at his post during World War II," she said. "I was a war orphan. I lived with my grandparents and other relatives until my father came home from the war."

"I got to go see him at boot camp in Missouri and I'll never forget something he did. We were sitting together and he took an old tin can and carved a set of dog tags for me, just like his. They even had my name on them."

Today, Siadous exhibits her work at the Lafayette gallery her father founded, the Allen Breaux Studio.

"I guess I got a lot of my creative ability from him," she said. "He could do anything with his hands and all my life he told me that I could do anything I wanted to do."