

## About the Cover Art

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Art appreciation is subjective. A design, a style, or even a medium might be a factor in determining whether an artist's creation will be successful. U.S. Coast Guard Veteran Nadine Lewis knows this first hand. Ms. Lewis says the abstract design used in her ceramic creation, *Puzzled Platter* (featured on the cover of this issue), was one she had used several times in the past in different formats, but she never had much success drawing attention in national competitions. "It wasn't until I used a technique called sgraffito on ceramics that people started to really take notice," she says.

Sgraffito is a technique that has been in use for several centuries, but hasn't garnered much attention until recently. The artist takes a multistep approach to creating the ceramics, scratching a design into the piece after the material first sets but before it is initially fired. After the ceramic piece is fired, glazing adds colors and texture and the piece is fired again. In the case of *Puzzled Platter*, Ms. Lewis also added pearling at the end, which she said really made the design "pop," and ultimately earned her a national award at the 2015 National Veterans Creative Arts Festival in Durham, North Carolina.

Ms. Lewis, who served 26 years in the Coast Guard at various locations throughout the United States, credits the art therapy staff and programs at the Oklahoma City Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Medical Center with helping her overcome some significant healthcare issues including posttraumatic stress disorder, feelings of inadequacy, bipolar disorder, and a traumatic brain injury.

"The VA staff gave me access to resources to really get my focus away from my ailments, to begin overcoming my fears, and to really express my creative side," she says. "I've been good at art all of my life, mostly doodling and drawing, but I never considered it true art. Now that I see what I am capable of creating, I have renewed faith in myself and my abilities, I have more emotional strength, and I can face my fears head-on. The way I see it, there are no judgments when you are an artist. I took the tools the VA provided, worked with an art teacher outside of the VA, and my confidence has never been higher!"

