

About the Cover Art



Twenty years in the Air Force allowed 72-year-old Sherman Watkins to experience a life much different from the one he grew up knowing. It allowed him to fulfill dreams, achieve goals, travel extensively, and gain skills that would benefit him throughout his life. It also taught him that there were always more opportunities to learn, grow, and make a difference. And he has carried these opportunities into his art.

Orphaned at a young age and raised by an aunt, Watkins began drawing to cope with feelings of stress and depression. He began drawing at age 6 and painting at age 15. “In high school, I joined every activity I could to get food and a shower,” said Watkins. “But I also dreamed for so much more in my life. I would draw to relax my mind.”

It’s hard to question that Watkins has achieved many of his dreams, especially as they relate to his art. Watkins said he’s collected 17 medals for his artwork since 1958. His latest work, *The Village*, which is featured on this cover, was selected as a national winner at the 2013 National Veterans Creative Arts Festival. He has been awarded numerous medals during the annual festival’s 11-year history, with this being the second national honor. This is also his second *JRRD* cover.

Watkins credits the Hampton Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Virginia with helping him to focus and deal with a range of disabilities. The retired illustrator from the space shuttle program and professional artist credits his wife and other fans for their encouragement and support. He has painted subjects ranging from nature and major events in African-American history to famous Americans.

“I’ve painted so many people—President Johnson and the Kennedys. I painted President Carter, and I painted Oprah,” said Watkins. His most recognized work, *A Price for Freedom*, was included in a traveling exhibit demonstrating the influence and importance of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s legacy through the visual arts, which was sponsored by the Smithsonian Institution. The exhibition, “In the Spirit of Martin: The Living Legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr.,” featured 118 works and toured the United States between 2000 and 2004.

“We’re honored to recognize some exceptional Veterans and highlight Veteran-created artwork on the cover of *JRRD*, in partnership with the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival,” said *JRRD* Editor Stacieann Yuhasz, PhD. “Their success proves year after year the value of recreation and art therapy in the healing process for Veterans and others. It also reaffirms the commitment the Department of Veterans Affairs has made to provide long-term solutions for caring for our nation’s Veterans. We thank these outstanding artists for their service and contributions.”

