

Honoring Those Who Serve

Reflections

Publisher's Note: *Reflections*, by Lee Teter, is possibly the best known artwork to pay tribute to the fallen soldiers of the Vietnam War. Below is a story by Jim Belsaw that was published in *The VVA Veteran* March/April 2004 and accurately presents the story of the painting. Regrettably, it has been edited for available space. The complete text can be found at www.leeteter.com.

BY JIM BELSAW

Describing Lee Teter's painting *Reflections* carries two risks. The first is inadequacy. No words can capture it. The second is redundancy. It is possible there is a Vietnam Veteran somewhere who has not seen it and been moved by it, but the likelihood is low, given the large number of prints in circulation. Nothing in the art world, save *The Wall* the painting depicts, has had the broad impact of Teter's 1988 work.

Nonetheless, a brief description: A man places his hand against the black granite wall. He doesn't see names on *The Wall*. He sees faces. He sees a past that never leaves him.

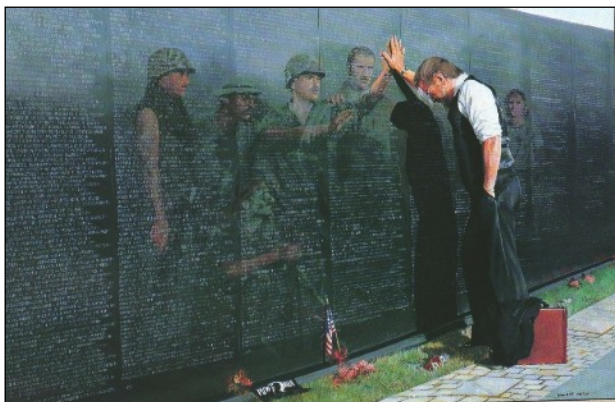
"It was the strangest thing," Teter said of the moment the image crystallized in his mind, well before the first brush had been dipped into paint. "When I thought of the picture, the hair raised on the back of my neck. I felt it then, and I felt it the whole time I painted it. I knew it would be powerful."

Teter licensed the rights to VVA Chapter 172 in Cumberland, Maryland. It has been a continuing success and print sales have benefited Veterans, their families, and their communities.

In 1988, shortly after the painting was completed, Teter took it with his historical artwork to a black powder shoot in Virginia. At a slow moment during the event, he left his tent to get something to eat. When he returned, there was a long line of people standing in front of the tent. Other people were coming out of the tent. They were crying. He could see the tears running down their faces.

"I knew what happened," he said. "Someone had put out *Reflections* (the original, not a print). These people coming out of the tent would immediately go and get one or two other people to stand in line, and then they'd wait again so they could see the picture with them.

The Veterans asked Teter what he intended to do with the painting. He told them VVA was going to sell prints as a fund-raising tool.



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He marvels that the painting is as popular as it is. Teter said that much of the impact of *Reflections* can be attributed to the powerful memories the image evokes.

"The picture is light reflecting off pieces of paint and the canvas," he said. "That's the painting. The picture itself is in the mind of the viewer. The art becomes every person. It triggers memories that are very, very personal. While we all see the same image on the canvas, we don't all see the same picture. The people it truly affects are people who have deeply buried memories, sometimes not so deeply buried. The faces they see are the faces they are familiar with, not the ones in the painting. People aren't seeing the painting. They're seeing reflections of their own past. That's why they cry. It's not my art. It's their memories."

"When *Reflections* was done and I took it over to the VVA meeting room, we put a cover on it and then unveiled it and I was surprised," he said. "I didn't see it anymore. I'd painted it away. It was gone. I'd given it to the world, and the world is a good place for it."

Prints of Lee Teter's *Reflections* can be ordered from VVA Chapter 172 at vietnamreflections.com.

In *Reflections*, Lee Teter depicted panels 29 and 30 East of the Vietnam Wall. Many names can be seen in their actual position on *The Wall*. The images of servicemen reflected in *The Wall* and their comrades were created with live models using a full length Plexiglas panel in Teter's cousin's yard. Some of the live models were Chapter 172 members.



These Vets from Riverdale Baptist Church in Nixa, participated in a 2016 Honor Flight. They are: Earl Fruits, Dan Spencer, Charley Fears, and Melvin Cole.

Riverdale Baptist Church
Riverdale Road • Nixa, Missouri
Jamie Bilyeu, Pastor

Sunday School, 10 a.m. • Worship Service, 10:45 a.m.
Wednesday Bible Study, 6:30 p.m.

Welcome all guests!
Once you attend, you are part of our family of God.

Veterans' Views

Deadline to apply: March 31, 2017.

The Springfield Art Museum is currently seeking submissions for Veterans' Views, a juried exhibition highlighting photographs taken by members of our nation's armed services and relating to their military experience, scheduled for July - November 2017. This exhibit is organized by the Springfield Art Museum in collaboration with Drury University.

Photographs must have been taken while on active duty for any branch of the United States Military, including National Guard Service. Subject matter is not limited - photographs may depict scenes of active duty and/or friends, civilians, the landscape, or scenery at any location or site visited during the tour of duty. Veterans do not need to consider themselves "artists" in order to enter, the Museum is particularly interested in highlighting the personal view of time spent while serving our country.

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