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Broken hands can't keep veteran from embroidery art

ARTS FESTIVAL: Luminous peacock is his 2nd top-prize finish.

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Michael Galante's award-winning embroidery "Dignity and Perseverance" is as much about capturing the beauty of a peacock as it is about his own struggles to overcome his disabilities. "Dignity and Perseverance" won first place in the 2006 National Veterans Creative Arts Festival needlework category and earned Galante a trip to Rapid City, S.D., earlier this month to meet with 130 other veterans who won top honors in nearly 160 categories.

The work, featuring a gold and blue peacock perched on a broken hibiscus branch, was hand-stitched using Chinese techniques that Galante taught himself using books and hours of practice. His work was submitted by a therapist at the VA medical facility in Anchorage where he receives care.

"I started keeping track of the work I was putting into it on a time card," said Galante, a U.S. Army combat veteran who served in Grenada. "After 400 hours, I lost track." His journey into the arts began when he learned to carve dolls out of moose antler and wanted to dress them in authentic clothing. He taught himself to sew and improved on his technique with each piece he finished.

"I'd carve the dolls and wanted to make the clothing myself, so I learned to embroider and embellish, which I ended up enjoying," he said. "I'd broken my hands and had severe frostbite at one point, and the needlework really helped strengthen the mobility in my hands and fingers."

Galante previously won first place in the festival in the knitting category.

"I feel full of pride to be chosen as a national winner, almost to a sinful degree," he said. "I began doing artwork to help with my physical problems, but soon found that the creative process helped me master and understand my mental and emotional confusion, while controlling my emotions."

Nationwide, Department of Veterans Affairs medical facilities use the creative arts as one form of rehabilitative care to help veterans recover from and cope with physical and emotional disabilities. The National Veterans Creative Arts Festival is a week of learning, exploring and fellowship. Because the gold-, silver- or bronze-medal winners are already selected to participate, there is no competition at the event; instead, it serves as a showcase for the award recipients.

"Our talented veterans are shining examples of the healing power of the arts," said R. James Nicholson, secretary of Veterans Affairs, in a press release. "Many participants were introduced to the arts in the rehabilitation programs of the Department of Veterans Affairs. The arts are one of many tools that VA uses in the recovery of our heroes."

As for Galante, the journey has just begun. He's already working on his entry for next year's competition -- a lace shawl he's knitting.

"I'm always learning," he said. "Despite the successes I've had, I still feel like I'm on a sharp learning curve."

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Illustration:

Photo 1: VetArt\_102506.jpg

Photo courtesy of the Creative Arts Festival

Michael Galante, an Alaska combat veteran who served in Grenada, won top honors in the needlework category at this year's National Veterans Creative Arts Festival in Rapid City, S.D., for his piece "Dignity and Perseverance."

Read more here: [http://nl.newsbank.com/nl-search/we/Archives?p\\_action=doc&p\\_docid=115072F7CF5994A8&p\\_docnum=3&s\\_trackval=&s\\_subexpir=05/25/2014%2014:05%20PM&s\\_dlid=DL0114042518051309840&s\\_accountid=AC0114042518005509700&s\\_referrer=&s\\_siteloc=&s\\_orderid=NB0114042518050609833&s\\_docsleft=9&s\\_docstart=10&s\\_docsbal=docs%20remaining:%209&s\\_subterm=Subscription%20until:%2005/25/2014%2014:05%20PM&s\\_ecproduct=SBK-M10&s\\_docsread=1&s\\_ecprodtype=TEST&s\\_upgradeable=no&s\\_username=mapplegate#storylink=cpy](http://nl.newsbank.com/nl-search/we/Archives?p_action=doc&p_docid=115072F7CF5994A8&p_docnum=3&s_trackval=&s_subexpir=05/25/2014%2014:05%20PM&s_dlid=DL0114042518051309840&s_accountid=AC0114042518005509700&s_referrer=&s_siteloc=&s_orderid=NB0114042518050609833&s_docsleft=9&s_docstart=10&s_docsbal=docs%20remaining:%209&s_subterm=Subscription%20until:%2005/25/2014%2014:05%20PM&s_ecproduct=SBK-M10&s_docsread=1&s_ecprodtype=TEST&s_upgradeable=no&s_username=mapplegate#storylink=cpy)