

Pysanky Expert Breaks Artistic Secrets Behind Egg Folk Art

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— Cambria County abounds with a rich ethnic heritage. This is evidenced by the many different festivals held throughout the year featuring ethnic food, crafts, music, and dance. One person who is instrumental in trying to preserve a bit of the area's culture diversity is Anne Majcher.

Anne lives with her husband, Joe, and children, Matthew, age ten, and Carolyn, age nine, in suburban Johnstown. At the present time, this former full-time chemistry and physics teacher enjoys being a stay-at-home mom. She does teach adult evening classes a few nights a week and enjoys this as she feels that her adult students are highly motivated. She is also active in her church as an organist and choir director.

Springtime is a busy season for Anne because she volunteers quite a bit of her time to teach the centuries-old craft of making pysanky. She is quick to point out that this craft is from her husband's ethnic background and not something that she grew up with. She's basically self-taught—has read a few books on the subject, attended

a few impromptu pysanky sessions, and has perfected what she does with a lot of practice.

It's an art form that she's passing on to her children but does admit that Matt's pysanky seem to have a "sports" theme to them. She is quite proud of the fact that two of the eggs which Carolyn did last year received ribbons at the Ukrainian Pysanky Festival.

Pysanky are raw multi-colored eggs which have been written on and intended as ornaments. Variations of this craft have been found throughout the countries of Eastern Europe including the Ukraine, Poland, and other Slavic-speaking nations. This is not a craft for an impatient person—a beginner can expect to spend approximately three hours on one egg.

In Anne's home, it is easy to see the results of her handiwork. Pysanky decorates the kitchen and dining area.

Anne said that one of the most important steps in the entire process is selecting a good egg. She admits to spending a good bit of time in the supermarket checking each individual egg. It (the egg) must be free of flaws. Any blueish-gray spotting or streaking on the shell indicates that the shell is



Anne uses an ear syringe to blow out the insides of the egg. When preparing many eggs, as she does for school groups, this is easier than doing this with her mouth.

weak. These spots are more easily seen by holding the eggs in front of a candle flame or bright light. This is called "candling" the egg.

Before beginning, be sure that your hands are clean. Any hand lotion, cream, etc. will tend to leave smudges on your egg. The egg must be at room temperature and placed in a vinegar and water rinse to clean the shell. The vinegar better prepares the shell to accept the dye.

Anne covers all of her work surfaces with old newspapers and then clean paper towels as this is a messy process. At this point the "egg-sports" disagree as to whether to work with a raw egg or one which has been hollowed out. There are advantages and disadvantages to both but the dyeing and wax application process is the same in either case.

Because quite a few of the persons attending her classes are beginners, Anne prefers to have

the egg hollow. To do this, pierce both ends of the egg with a hat pin and insert this far enough, into the egg to pierce and stir up the yolk. Blow into the narrow end and the egg will exit through the wide end, which has been enlarged slightly. The inside of the shell should then be rinsed with a small amount of clear water. Pat the egg dry with a clean paper towel.

Now you are ready to begin applying your design. An easy way to divide the egg in half is to place a rubber band around the egg and trace around the rubber band very lightly with a pencil. In Christian terms the band symbolizes "eternity". Anne prefers geometric designs and quickly sections off the two faces of the egg and pencils in guide lines.

She is preparing a few dozen eggs for three classes which she'll be teaching at her children's school, St. Clement Elementary. The school children are eager to do

their eggs and the school personnel feel that they are fortunate to have such a nice diversion. Each child will then have a keepsake ornament to take home along with a new appreciation for a different folk culture.

A kistka, is an instrument which resembles an old time fountain pen and is used to apply the wax to the egg. The tip of the kista is heated slightly and then beeswax (no other wax will do) is scooped into its reservoir above its tip. Again heat the kistka, slightly and the beeswax will be free flowing. Anything drawn on the egg with the kistka will remain white. Anne describes this as a very sophisticated form of "wax resist." At this time the holes at the top and bottom of the egg should be sealed with wax.

The egg is now ready to go into the first color of dye. This is the lightest color of the color sequence you wish to use. A traditional sequence would be yellow, orange, red, and black. Take the egg out of the dye and pat dry with a clean paper towel. Next, use the kistka to fill in any spaces, lines, designs, etc. which you wish to remain yellow. Dye in the next darker color. (Now you have some white and yellow protected.) Continue with the kistka and dye. After the last color is applied, dry the egg for at least ten minutes. No moisture can be on the egg for the last step.

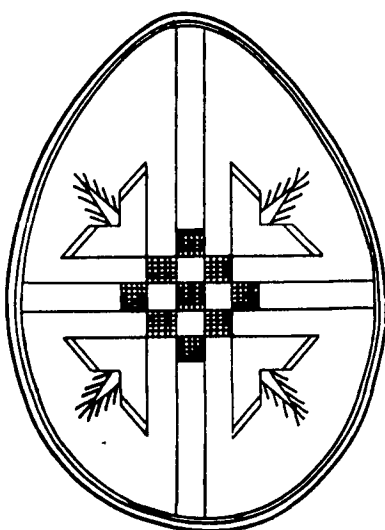
At this point the egg looks rather messy since the beeswax is an ugly greenish-black color. It's difficult to imagine that this mass of wax is

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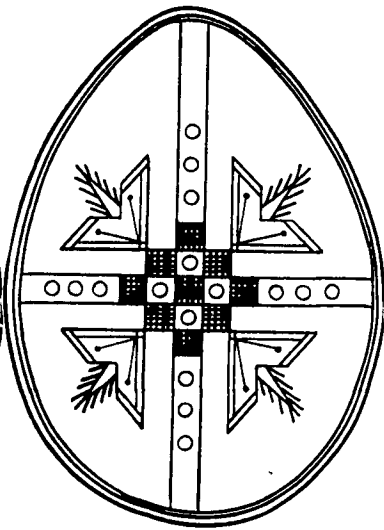


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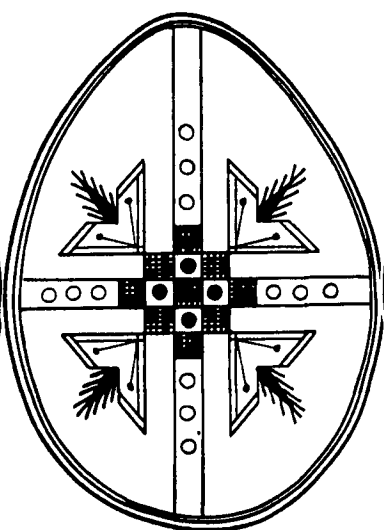
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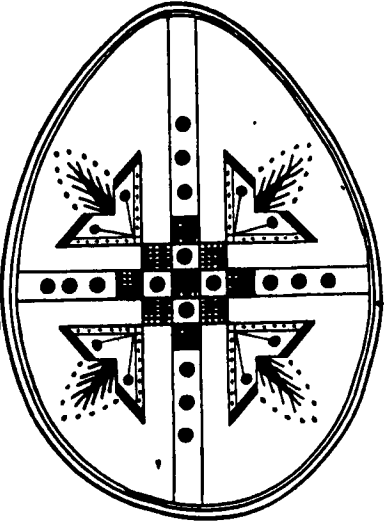
White



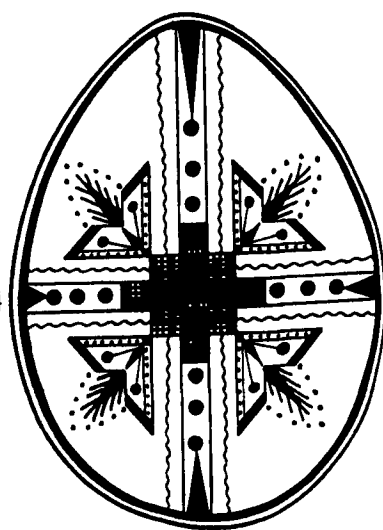
Yellow



Green



Orange



Red, Black Background