



Waxed Meditation Eggs  
Created by Orthodox Nuns

# Folkart eggs

VOL. 2 # 1





It seems as though we've just packed away the last of the Christmas ornaments & vacuumed up the last remnants of tinsel, when with a quick glance over our shoulder reveals the Easter season sneaking up on us!

Being a movable feast, Easter can sometimes arrive sooner than expected - this year Ash Wednesday has come even before St. Valentine's Day! So before we get caught up in the kids' new clothes, the new hats & shoes and of course, that last dozen of eggs to finish; let's take a little time to examine the old meanings behind these traditional spring rites.

From out of the darkness of winter the hope always gleamed of the salvation of spring. The worst was almost over, but there was still the uncertainty of the months to come. So this time was spent in great personal preparations, to build strength & character in order to prove that they were indeed ready and most importantly worthy of the glories to come.

With the coming of Christ's message of peace & love into the world, these great mysteries were seen as fulfilled promises & were adapted by the Church

Fathers into the liturgy of the Easter season. These days of great personal & spiritual preparations are now known as Lent and begins each year on Ash Wednesday. But there is still another older tradition more representative of the spring renewals - the custom & the giving of eggs!



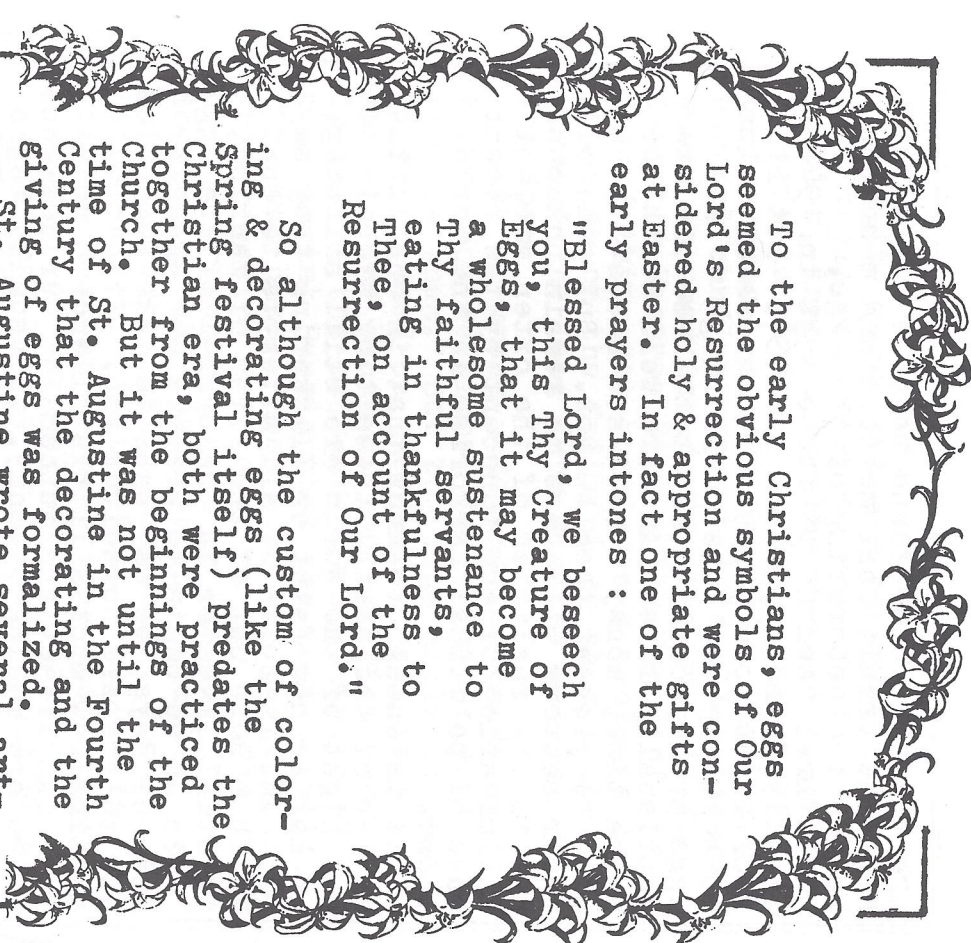
To the early Christians, eggs seemed the obvious symbols of Our Lord's Resurrection and were considered holy & appropriate gifts at Easter. In fact one of the early prayers intones:

"Blessed Lord, we beseech you, thy Thy Creature of Eggs, that it may become a wholesome sustenance to thy faithful servants, eating in thankfulness to Thee, on account of the Resurrection of Our Lord."

So although the custom of coloring & decorating eggs (like the Spring festival itself) predates the Christian era, both were practiced together from the beginnings of the Church. But it was not until the time of St. Augustine in the Fourth Century that the decorating and the giving of eggs was formalized.

St. Augustine wrote several articles on the subject & even recommended dyeing the eggs red, in honor of the blood of Christ, sacrificed for our sins. This too had been "borrowed", from the Chinese, who had been dyeing & giving red eggs for centuries. These were given as tokens of life & love, especially to the parents of new born babies.

As you can see, from this short history the connection between preparations for a Spring Festival & the giving of eggs is well connected & well documented. But the wax meditation eggs made by a small group of nuns, featured in this issue





are the only ones found to date which have kept the traditional methods and meanings behind the decorating of the eggs.

I first "heard" of these eggs in 1978 & finally found a picture in 1981. But it took three more years & two overseas trips to actually see "the real thing"! All eggs are special to me, but these are exceptionally rare. And are well worth the extra time, money & patience needed to be able to present them to you. But some of their secrets will have to remain unknown, due to the realities of the often violent intimidation of the innocent by the recent wave of political terrorism in the world today.

It is enough to know that in one little corner of the earth, these tiny symbols of the Light of the World are still shining, no matter how faint or flickering they may be. And in spite of all attempts to snuff Faith & Hope out of the lives of mankind, it still lives on in the symbol of the egg.

So as we begin to prepare our eggs for the holidays, we may want to take some time out to prepare ourselves too. It's truly amazing how much a little silence & solitude can affect the outcome of our designs. If we are making pysanky, we usually begin with those little blocks of beeswax. But years ago, our wax came from "church" candles & we generally had a plentiful supply. We have become so accustomed to our modern electricity that we can barely tolerate even the smallest "brown out" yet alone a complete & total black out. Then we quick run to our emergency supply of candles "for the duration". But years ago candles were the chief source of light & came in a great variety of sizes & styles.

Although used for all church celebrations the greatest amount were used during the Easter Vigil. This was observed amidst

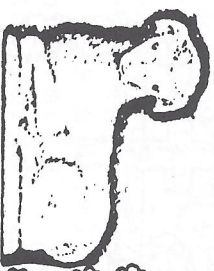
great illuminations. Rulers would set up and ignite large pillars of wax in order to make their cities appear as bright as day. Candles, lamps & torches were also used by private citizens to light the front of their homes. In the churches, the large Paschal candle & hand held smaller tapers would be used to provide the symbols for Christ's Resurrection & the Maker of Light. All of this must have made a profound impression on the faithful as they waited through the long dark night & watched for the dawn.

With so great a demand for candles, there soon developed large factories to produce them. But the fine artistic embellishment used on the church candles was kept in the hands of the religious devotee. It was in the convents & monasteries of old Czarist Russia that the most beautiful work was done. Most scholars believe that this practice developed at the candle works of the Orthodox Church in Russia, & now are located in the Novodyevichi Monastery. But there is very little historical documentation available in the West & only a few inferences can be made from photographs & samples of work allowed abroad.

But what little we do know about these waxed meditation eggs, ties all three of these early Spring rites together in one little neat "egg" package.

This style of egg decoration is only done now by the few good Sisters connected with the Orthodox Church in exile.

These elderly Nuns are the only surviving link in the West to this very traditional artistic expression of God's Love, which has been passed down for generations with -in the religious community.





These eggs are not made for "nice" as the Pennsylvania Dutch so pleasantly put it. But rather, they are made for the honor and glory of the Lord. They can only be made during the Lenten season. For they are created through a total & committed exercise of spiritual meditation which allows no room for worldly distractions. As a result they are the physical embodiment of one single human beings' devotion to her Lord & Master through prayer & sacrifice. Each coat of wax, each tiny bead, each ribbed finial is a physical human action done in the Name and Honor of the Lord.

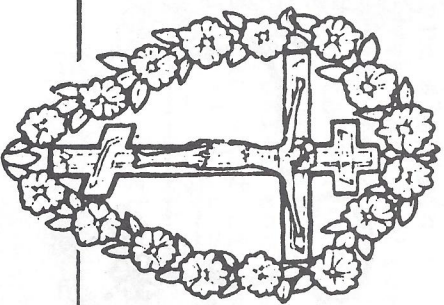
The age old period of preparation for a Great celebration is reflected in the 40 days of Lent. The Egg is representative of the LIFE that is to be Reborn and is encased in protective layers of wax symbolic of the Light of the World, which will soon Awaken that Life within the Egg and enlighten the World with It's Light ! So much encased in so little.

The actual technique for making these waxed meditative eggs is a well guarded secret steeped in age old traditions by the good sisters. Hollow, blown eggs, (usually brown chicken eggs) are covered with many coats of "church" wax.

On the front broadside of the egg is a beautiful four colored commercial decal of the Resurrection. It depicts a triumphant Risen Christ emerging from His tomb of

darkness & carrying a flag with His Cross emblazoned on it. It is framed within a border of intricate bead work, which then continues down and around to the bottom of the egg itself.

This most unusual beading technique is further developed on the reverse broadside. A wide variety



of meticulously worked patterns featuring designs based upon embroidery motifs are characteristic of these waxed eggs. The decorated ornamentation is generally a geometric or floral arrangement. But each one is highly individualistic & unique unto itself. A further indication of their special super-human creation.

The Russian alphabet characters X B which represents the traditional Easter greeting, "Christos Voskress" or Christ is Risen, are embedded in the wax on either side of the decal.

The blow hole on the top is beautifully concealed by a series of flowing loops, which are gathered together in the center & makes a perfect means to hang the egg. Originally, these eggs were hung or placed in the family "holy corner or Icon corner". This was usually a small shelf located on the far wall, facing the door of the family's main living area. Often it was just behind the chair of the father at the dinner table. Besides these special eggs there was also some pysanky, candles, incense, holy pictures of saints & perhaps an icon of Christ or His Mother. All of this reflected the health & hearth of the family's life together united with God.

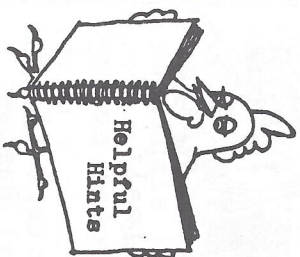
Although we have found archaeological evidence that the patterns & traditions of pysanky and of egg art itself are much older in concept than these waxed eggs, there has been no clear cut evidence that these customs were anything more than a local cottage craft of limited interest.

But as we can see from the emphasis placed upon the creation of these waxed eggs, that there was a very special &





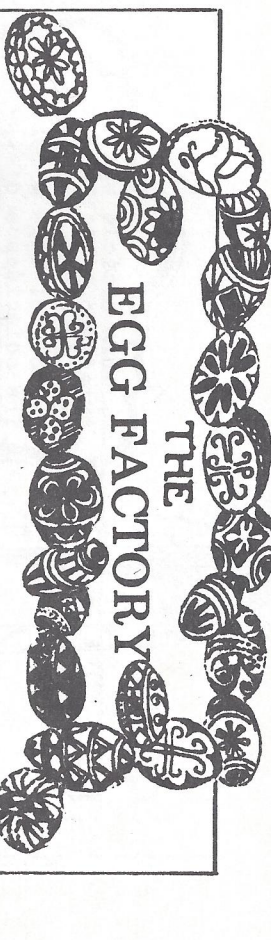
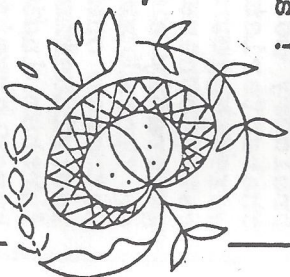
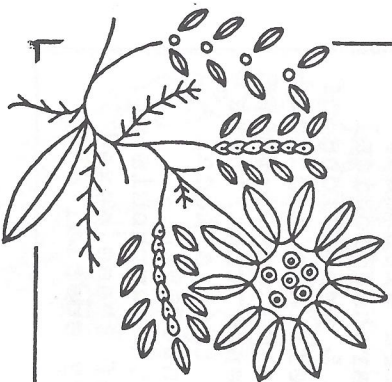
formal spiritual significance placed upon them by religious leaders. So we are beginning to see some written historical documentation of traditional beliefs!



Although I cannot be as helpful as I usually am in providing hints for making the exact eggs as depicted in this issue (because of promises made to the Sisters); I can supply alternative suggestions & methods. Instead of using the difficult & time consuming wax coatings, you may want to merely glue the readily available craft beads onto a white or colored egg. Many patterns can be adapted from our basic ones used in pysanky or even some floral embroidered motifs like those on this page.

Try to keep the designs simple. And only work on one side of the egg at a time. Although you may want to do a complete overall design, instead of front, back & sides.

Use new or fresh glue so that the beads will adhere quickly, set up slowly & last longer. This is extremely important, especially when working with such tiny beads. It's heartbreaking to spend time doing the intricate beadwork, only to have it fall off in a week. That is why, hanging eggs might be more preferable - they can be kept up and away from the "Fingers of Curiosity". Choose beads that are flat on at least one side or lay then down so that the hole faces up.



## THE EGG FACTORY

Like pysanky or the straw applique & even the folk painting techniques which have been greatly affected & improved by modern advances in better dyes, stronger glues & more protective finishes; these waxed eggs have also progressed into the modern age. Originally the central figure of Christ may have been hand painted or inlaid with beadwork. The ribbons may have been silken cords or merely strings.

But the mental & spiritual process has remained the same, adapting to the new advances while preserving the old traditions. Masterpieces of the metaphysical.

In the past few months, I have been able to obtain a very small & limited number of these waxed meditation eggs, created by these lovely nuns. If any of you would be interested in adding to your own egg collections or merely making a donation to the good Sisters allowing them to continue with their charitable works, please send me a self addressed stamped envelope.

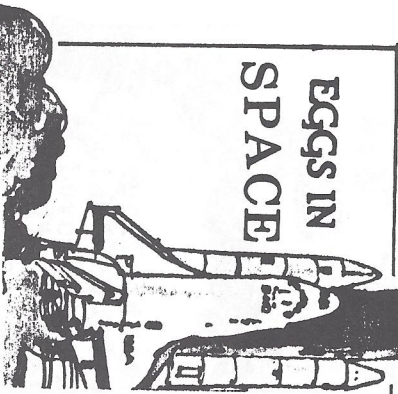
Due to certain international political & financial difficulties at the moment, I would request that you do not send any money until you have received detailed instructions. In this world of indiscriminate terrorism I would prefer to be safe, rather than sorry, especially in dealing with lives other than my own.

These particular eggs represent LIFE & I do not want them hurt.





## EGGS IN SPACE



This article was being typed around 11:30 A.M. on Jan. 28, 1986 - combining my love of eggs & space. The coincidence of the tragedy that followed was too great to ignore nor remove from this issue... another episode in the events of eggs & mankind!

When the space shuttle Challenger lifts off on its latest adventure into space, it will be carrying 32 fertilized chicken eggs!

The eggs-in-space experiment was developed to determine the effects of weightlessness on fertilized eggs. These "space eggs" will be riding in a special incubator & the astronauts will monitor their condition twice daily during the flight. Christa McAuliffe, the first teacher in space, will explain the progress of the eggs in a special space broadcast to students (& us egress too).

Since there is no gravity in space, the yolk will be suspended inside the eggs, which may make a difference in the way a chick develops. Other eggs from the same hatchery will remain on earth so that the chicks can be compared upon hatching.

There are already several requests from various zoos, requesting the first SUPER CHICKENS! This special project was developed by a 20 year old student, John Vellinger at Purdue University. And is being sponsored by Kentucky Fried Chicken... so who gets all those egg shells?

At this point the question is mute & so is the experiment. But it is of note to reflect upon EVOLUTION & how fate has tied so many events of man together with the EGG.



## Calendar of Events

Pysanky classes will be held every Sunday in February at St. Mary's Ukrainian Orthodox Church, 803 N. Front St. Allentown Pa. 18103.

March 1-2 Northern California Egg Show, Ricky's Hyatt House, 4219 El Camino Real, Palo Alto; send SASE to: Penney Anderson, 250 Del Medio Ave. #103, Mt. View CA. 94040  
 March 8 - Mr. Edward Yacher will demonstrate Polish Pysanki (pin head) at the Santee Library, 9225 Carlton Hills Blvd., Santee Calif. from 11:00am-3:00 pm.  
 March 8-9 - California Egg Show has been relocated to Vacation Village, San Diego send SASE to Jane Atwater for NEW DETAILS: 1234 Plaza del Monte, Santa Barbara CA 93101

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 Both Yvonne Wraige from the British Egg Art Guild and MYSELF have decided to "egg our way West", so all the Calif. readers are invited to join us for some FUN in San Diego.  
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March 15-16 - EGGSibit'86 at the Firth Youth Center, send SASE to Kit Stansbury, 71 Bennett St. Phillipsburg, N.J. 08865.

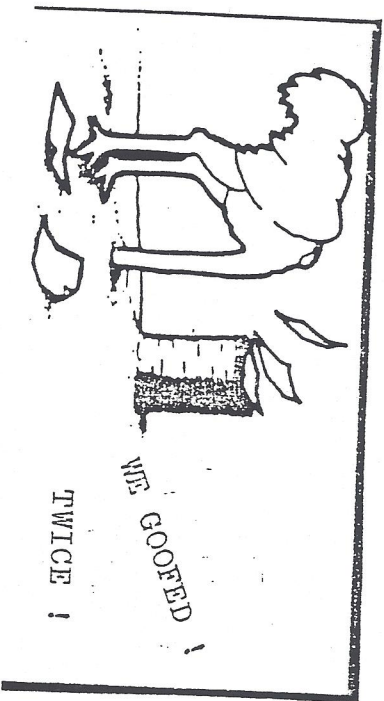
March 23-30 Schoharie's Egg Exhibit, send SASE to Cater's Auction Service, The Fox Creek Auction Grounds, Rt. 443, West Berne, N.Y.

April 27 - Folkart Egg Contest & Sale, 4 Krumb St. Parlin, N.J. send SASE to me.  
 May 17-18 - The Land of Lilliput at the Riverside Convention Center, Rochester, N.Y. send SASE to Ron Guidone, 16 Old Forge Lane, Pittsford, N.Y. 14534.

June 7-8 EGGSibit Southwest at the Northpark Inn, Dallas Tx. Send SASE to Jane Crawley, P.O. Box 38406, Dallas, Tx. 75238.







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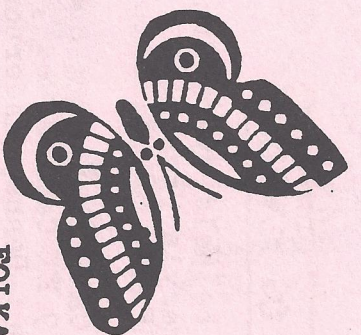
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