



Czechoslovak Kraslice
Scratch-Carve

folkart eggs

KRASLICE



The eggs featured in this issue are generally known as "scratched-carved" but there are many other names in many other countries. These, however, are very special ones. They were made this past year in Czechoslovakia for export, & are pretty representative of what is currently being produced there today.

These scratched "Kraslice" are the third oldest of the ancient folk art methods of egg art. "Scratching" developed from the wish of women to express their own individual ideas upon eggshells by first coloring the eggs a solid color & then removing some of it to form the symbols, designs and patterns.

Although the theories of dyeing and design are relatively the same, the individual ethnic methods of achieving them are varied & distinctive. Which makes folk art such an interesting medium to study.

So the eggs shown on the front cover are indicative of the many possibilities in scratch-carving. There are some which resemble pysanky borders, both horizontal & vertical. Others have wide or feathery ribbons or geometric patterns. While still others are beautifully stylized flowers & animals.

The colors too are variable. Not only from region to region but often in the same dye pot. For these are all made from natural ingredients found in the yard, woodland, meadows and of course - the kitchen !

So open up your cupboards, check your spice rack & pick some flowers - we're going to spend the summer experimenting.

SCRATCH-CARVE

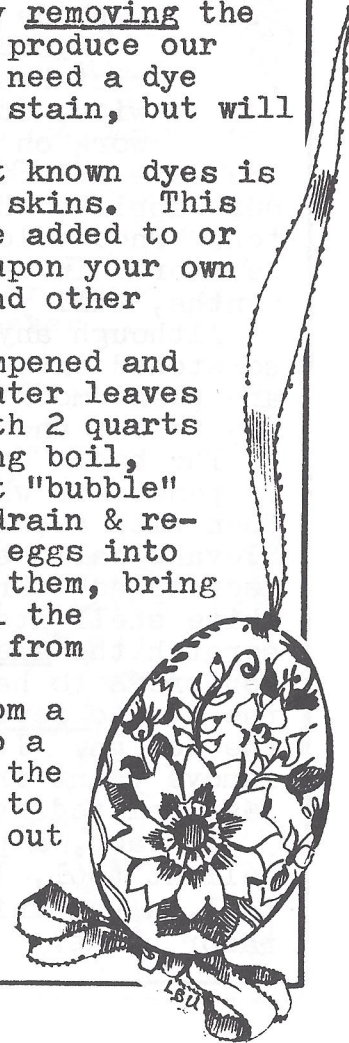
Almost all scratch-carved eggs, be they traditional or modern, begin with the preparation of a natural dye. Although we now have the option of all sorts of dyeing liquids - from fabric dyes to shoe polish - they are all synthetic, especially formulated to give strong, fast & long lasting brilliant colors.

Which is precisely what we don't want in scratch carving. For we shall be attempting to create our designs by removing the color in various degrees to produce our motifs. Therefore, we will need a dye which will give a permanent stain, but will also be easy to remove.

One of the easiest & best known dyes is that made from common onion skins. This is a BASIC RECIPE and can be added to or subtracted from, depending upon your own personal color preference and other experimentation.

Place about 4 cups of dampened and packed onion skins (brown outer leaves only) in a pot and cover with 2 quarts of water. Bring to a rolling boil, lower to a medium heat & let "bubble" for 30 minutes. Let cool, drain & remove skins. Place 6-10 -12 eggs into the pot, pour dye bath over them, bring to a boil. Let simmer until the desired color is achieved - from 30 minutes to 2 hours.

The colors will range from a yellow to gold to a brown to a "thick" sienna. The darker the color the easier it will be to remove. Try taking one egg out at each color stage & then experiment with scratching out a design for different





effects. Move the eggs around a bit while in the pot so that they don't become "polka dotted".

Eggs can also be boiled along with the onion skins, thus saving a step & giving them an extra "boil". Empty blown eggs will have to be filled with water to stay submerged during the dyeing. While full raw eggs which will be kept for "nice", should be hard boiled at least 2 hrs. before dyeing. This is to insure all the egg is cooked & the moisture has been evaporated, and will not explode in a few months.

Since this is an edible dye, all mistakes can be easily eaten. Likewise, full eggs may be easier to work on for the beginner. As they are more able to withstand the extra pressure applied while first learning to scratch. Once colored & cooled, these eggs can be stored in cardboard cartons for several months, till you are able to work on them.

Although any design or pattern can be scratched onto the shells, the most favored are plant motifs - flowers of any sort & of any talent and any taste.

The basic outlines are drawn or traced in pencil or white chalk on the shell. Then with a sharp instrument which the Slovaks call "scrabach" the design is "scratched" through the dye & onto the white shell itself. The object is not to scratch the shell, which you may pierce if you press too hard, but rather to scrap off the dye to reveal the shell & thus form the design. It's kind of like trying to remove paint from a window after you've just painted the sill !

In fact, a paint scrapper makes an excellent tool, likewise, a ceramic cleaning tool, a pen knife, needle, nail file or a razor blade.

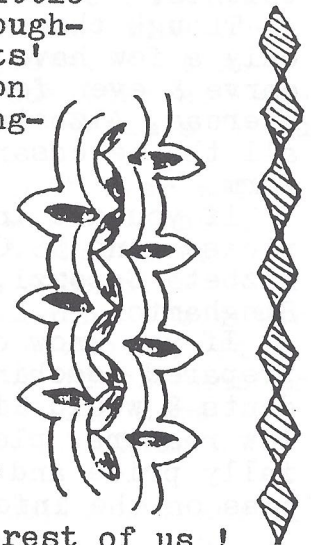
Once completed the patterns can be preserved with a clear ceramic spray or any lacquer or varnish. If they are to be eaten butter, lard or vegetable oil will give the same shiny effect and be perfectly safe .

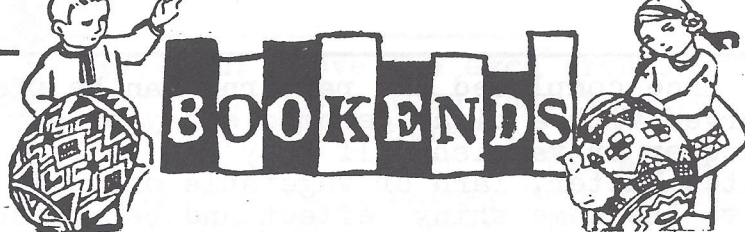
Variations in color can be achieved by the amount & type of onions used for the dye bath. Other natural vegetable matter from green grass to coffee or tea will produce color for your eggs.

The summer is the best time to do your experimenting. Do not be discouraged by your first attempts. The color may be there, but you may need more vegetable matter to bring it out. A rule of thumb is your thumb..... if it will dye your thumb with color..... it will also dye your egg!

But don't get hung up on producing the dyes. If you want to merely practice your scratching designs, use your regular egg dyes or fabric dyes and then scratch your pattern. Work to develop your scratching technique then later... or never ... try the vegetable dyes.

Time passes, technology develops, countries change and yet our little egg is still wandering throughout the world, spreading its' messages of love & affection in many areas & in many languages. Scratch-carving is but one of them . This folkart developed because there was a need for expression & natural dyes met that need. Today, the expression is still necessary but we have many choices, to fulfill it. So don't be limited, use each & every method available to you & then invent your own. And then share it with the rest of us !





While doing research for many of the articles which appear in each issue of FOLK ART EGGS, I try to highlight some of the talents of your fellow readers. We owe the beauty of the first two pages to the sketches of Lillian Urganus, who uses these on her note cards and very kindly allowed me to share them with you.

The borders for the scratch-carve article come from Alzbeta Borovicka Capozzi, who is a Czechoslovak kraslice teacher, & has prepared an excellent workbook for her students. It is filled with background material on Czechoslovak culture especially about the Easter holidays and more details for making kraslice eggs.

But the best part for us, is her designs & patterns. She has developed a wonderful assortment of borders & flowers which can be easily adapted to your own creative talents.

Though there are many books on egg art, only a few have a page or more on scratch-carve & even fewer have designs or patterns. Whereas, Alzbeta has very nicely compiled all the necessary details into a nice neat form.

If you are interested in her workbook, please send \$6.00 plus \$1.50 postage to Alzbeta Capozzi, 1416 Livingston Place, Binghamton, N.Y. 13903.

If you know of anyone else who has prepared teaching materials for their students & would like to share with your fellow readers, please send me details, especially price and postage, & I'll be glad to pass on the information.

Information & where to find it have always been a major draw back with folk artists, for we all have a tendency to be spread out & far between. But through this little newsletter we are beginning to find each other. In dribs & drabs, I found you and in bits & pieces you found me. But there is a missing link - you've not found each other.

For some of you living in the same city or with the same interest I have passed on a name or two. But for the most part, we're still "one-ies & two-ies". So how to find each other ?

We Americans are very verbal, not only vocally but also with signs & symbols - on T-shirts, plastic buttons & monogrammed EVERYTHING - including bumper stickers.

This idea come from an overseas friend who was totally amazed at the things we Americans "say" on our bumper stickers. So she suggested that we advertize - let every one know that we're around ! Use bumper stickers to find others, especially during the Easter season and especially for teachers & their students.

My little gift to the early bird subscription renewals this year was some bumper stickers. But she suggested that we carry it a step further & use them as calling cards to find other folk artists in our area.

I have a limited supply left over which we can experiment with, on a trial basis & see who can "find" another folkartist. Send me a \$1.50 for postage & handling & 3 PYSANKY PEOPLE bumper stickers - one for you & two friends. Let's see who can find who first. If each one of us finds another friend in a 25 mile radius of our home - then fun is only a phone call & class & club away.

Our little egg is on a bumper sticker & she's all set to start a wandering again !



Sometimes I wish there really was an "egg factory". A nice big warehouse someplace on Main St., Your Town, America. So that when my dyes go bad, the kistka clogs & the wax blobs I can just return everything to the manufacturer for service repairs !

Other times, I FEEL like an "egg factory" - especially around Palm Sunday when everyone else's eggs are done but mine !

But this little "egg factory" does exist - all be it - only in my mind & your eyes - for the moment (but maybe one day ?). It's purpose is to let you know what's new on the market, not only for egggers but for us neglected folk artists .

To begin at the beginning. A new egg blower ? No, an old glue syringe from the medical supplies. It's the same identical item just used differently. I find this method of blowing eggs, much simpler, less time consuming & more energy efficient.

I can have a dozen eggs blown, cleaned & mess put away in about half an hour's time. This method only requires one hole, usually on the broad end where the air pocket is & about three "swishes" of the syringe filled with air. Fill the syringe with water and/or vinegar solution, squirt into the egg, shake it around a bit & then use the syringe to flush out the wash water & let the egg drip dry. Done !

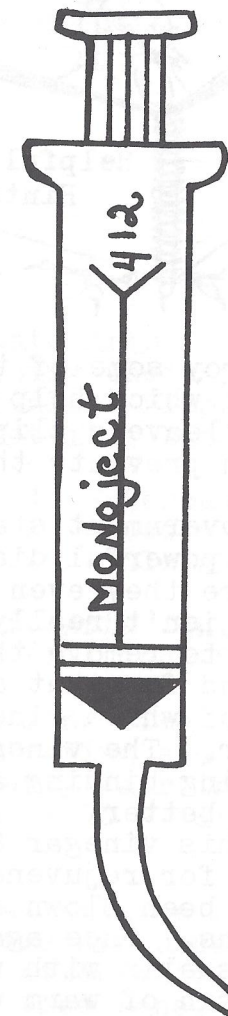
The major disadvantage, is however, the much larger hole needed to accommodate both the tip of the syringe and an air space to allow the egg liquid to come out. But since the hole can be covered with wax or the design made to "sit on the egg" in one direction on an egg stand, this problem can be adapted to suit the type of folk art egg you are doing.

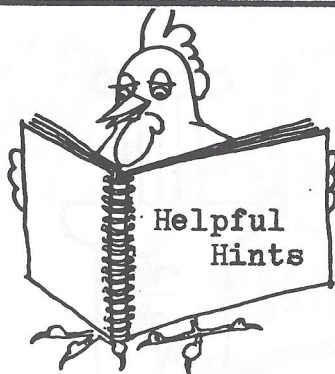
It may not be perfect for a complicated geometric kistka pysanky, but for a wax pin head, straw applique or even a scratch-carve, it can work nicely.

These glue syringes are generally found in "hobby" shops, mainly model train or airplane and not necessarily the usual "craft" shops we are used to looking in.

As with most things when you describe it - they don't have it. But show them the item & Bingo - its there. So I've traced mine for you to take & show them what you are looking for. Likewise, dentists, doctors & veterinarians also use these (their original purpose) so you might try one of your "friendly" ones around town.

The syringes are absolutely perfect for filling eggs when they are to be submerged for vegetable dyeing..... hint, hint, hint.





While we're on the subject of cleaning eggs - let's talk about one more thing SOAP. Please, please try NOT to use it - if you can possibly help it - it really only hurts your chances of a workable eggshell.

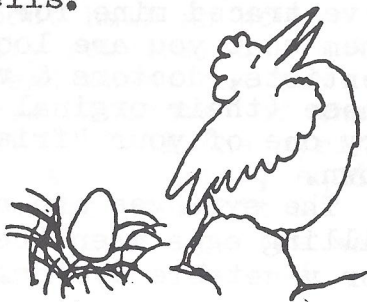
Soaps & detergents destroy some of the natural oils on the shell which help it to retain colors. They also leave a slippery film on the shell which prevents the dyes from "taking" properly.

Government standards require the use of very powerful disinfectants on the eggs before they even leave the farm. So your soap isn't really "killing the bugs" - its just to remove the dried egg whites & yolk.

And for that all you need is about one cup of white vinegar to a gallon of hot water. The vinegar actually acts as a re-storing binding agent to help the dyes adhere better.

This vinegar & water solution is also good for rejuvenating old eggshells which have been blown & not used for several months. Once again, use the syringe to fill the shells with water & vinegar, place in a basin of warm water & another cup of vinegar & let soak till little bubbles form on the outside of the shells.

Remove, drain & let drip dry. It's like a soothing & relaxing bubble bath for the shells' little pores - and they're all ready to recieve your patterns, your hopes & your dreams !



Calendar of Events

Once again the Garden State Arts Center in Holmdel N.J. will be holding their annual series of ethnic festivals. Please contact them directly for details, but the festival dates are :

June 2 - Polish	Sept. 15 - German
8 - Italian	22 - Scottish
15 - Ukrainian	29 - Slovak
30 - Irish	

The address is : Garden State Arts Center, Box 116 Holmdel, N.J. 07733 (201) 442-9200.

Mrs. Mary Butterfield, a long time pysanky artist will be demonstrating and lecturing on pysanky at the County Fair in Del Mar, Calif. on June 26 from 11:00 - 12:00. Do stop in & say "hi".

The Kutztown Folk Festival will be held the week of July 4th and there are usually several good egg artists in attendance. Kutztown Folk Festival, 461 Vine Lane, Kutztown, Pa. 19530 (215) 683-8707.

EGGSibit Southwest will be held at the Northpark Inn, Dallas Tx. June 8-9. Send 2 stamps for info. to Jane Crawley, P.O. Box 3804 Dallas, Tx. 78534.

INDY EGG Show will be held at the Sheraton Meridian in Indianapolis, In. on Sept. 7 & 8.



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