

The Pysanka: A Symbol of Hope

A Living Installation of Ukrainian Easter Eggs

Ongoing from March 24, 2022

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Ukraine is under brutal assault. Ukraine's people are perishing. Ukraine's culture, its theaters, museums and churches are being destroyed. Ukraine's soul is fighting for survival. In the face of such inhumanity, we are all Ukrainian. We are all called to Ukraine's defense.

Sofika Zielyk, an ethnographer and *pysanka* (Ukrainian Easter egg) artist is also fighting back. Her weapon of choice is the ordinary, humble egg.

Together with the **Ukrainian Institute of America** (UIA) and the **World Federation of Ukrainian Women's Organizations** (WFUWO), Ms. Zielyk conceived and

produced a communal and participatory exhibition of the *pysanka*. This initiative encourages children and adults of all backgrounds, beliefs and ages to enrich a living installation of *pysanky* (plural of *pysanka*) by contributing their own egg, hand decorated using traditional Ukrainian techniques and motifs. This installation is an ongoing, living, and evolving endeavor. As more *pysanky* continue to arrive — in person, and by mail from all over the world — the installation will grow in size and symbolic power.

Ms. Zielyk explains her inspiration for the project by harkening back to an ancient Ukrainian legend of good versus evil:

“The inhabitants of the Carpathian Mountains in Western Ukraine believed that the fate of the world depended on the *pysanka*. Each year, an evil monster, chained to a mountain cliff, sent his henchmen to see how many *pysanky* (plural for *pysanka*) were created in the land. If the number was high, the henchmen returned and tightened the monster's chains. If the *pysanka* creating tradition subsided, the monster's chains were loosened and he was free to wander the earth causing destruction.”

True to its symbolic meaning of rebirth, these *pysanky* will return to their ancestral homeland of Ukraine as it rises from the ashes of war.

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About the Pysanka

Thousands of years ago, the agrarian people living in the area now known as Ukraine, depended on the Sun for survival. It gave them light, warmed them and made their crops grow. Not surprisingly they came to venerate the Sun as one of their most important gods and created rituals to honor this deity. Pagan spring rituals celebrated the return of the Sun after a long dark winter and the humble egg played a central role in this celebration.

Created using the batik wax-resistance technique, the Ukrainian Easter egg or *pysanka* (from the word “pysaty” or “to write”) was believed to possess enormous power. For the ancients, holding a *pysanka* in one's hand was a way of harnessing the power of the sun. The whole egg represented the rebirth of nature, while the yolk alone was the symbol of the all powerful Sun god. *Pysanky* (the plural of a *pysanka*) were revered as talismans; they protected the family against evil, disease and fire. People believed that through patterns on the egg shell they could send messages of tributes and entreaties to the pagan gods.

When Ukraine accepted Christianity in the 10th century AD, many aspects of paganism were incorporated into the new religion. The *pysanka* transitioned from a spring ritual to a celebration of Easter.

www.sofika.com

About the Ukrainian Institute of America

The Ukrainian Institute of America is nonprofit organization with the fundamental purpose of developing and promoting a greater awareness, understanding, knowledge and appreciation in the United States of the traditional and contemporary art, literature, music, culture, history and traditions of Ukraine, as revealed through its people, both in Ukraine and abroad. It strives to strengthen the identity and community of individuals of Ukrainian descent by organizing art exhibitions, concerts, conferences, symposia and other educational, and professional activities by fulfilling its ideals as the community's “Window on Ukraine.”

About the World Federation of Ukrainian Women's Organizations

Established in 1948 in the United States, in Philadelphia, by ten women's organizations, the World Federation of Ukrainian Women's Organizations (WFUWO), now based in Toronto, Canada, unites 27 organizations from 17 countries on four continents. Representing a spectrum of women's organizations pursuing civic, religious, cultural, educational, immigration, and humanitarian goals, WFUWO reflects the activity of local Ukrainian communities worldwide, as well as international networking through a relationship with the United Nations. At the core of WFUWO's mission is support for the dignity and integrity of women in Ukraine and Ukrainian women in émigré communities by supporting adherence to international standards of human rights, raising public awareness of problems and violations, maintaining Ukrainian language and culture, cultivating awareness of Ukrainian history, family and social traditions, as well as efforts that support modern Ukraine's development into an independent, stable democracy with respect for rule of law.

The Pysanka: A Symbol of Hope opens on Thursday, March 24, 2022 and is ongoing.

Public hours: Thursday to Sunday, 12:00 – 6:00 PM, or by appointment.

For further information: Please contact the Ukrainian Institute of America (212) 288-8660 or via email at mail@ukrainianinstitute.org.

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