



Sylvia Mamchur Robertson

Folk Arts: Ukrainian Pysanky – “Egg Writing”



Henderson
(702) 630-0682
sylrobertson2012@gmail.com

Sylvia grew up in Saskatchewan, Canada. Ukrainian was spoken in her home, and as a child she became fluent in both Ukrainian and English. She learned Ukrainian embroidery, egg arts, and other traditional arts from family members. Sylvia studied *pysanky*—Ukrainian egg “writing” or decorating—with master artist Zoria Zetaruk under the Nevada Arts Council’s Folklife Apprenticeship Program, and has been teaching and demonstrating the art form ever since.

Pysanky are not painted to achieve their design, but are created through a wax resist process. Sylvia demonstrates and teaches each stage of this process. First, she draws the basic designs on the hollow shell with a pencil. Then she applies hot wax along the penciled design with a *kistka* (stylus) before dipping the egg in dye. This process is repeated multiple times, adding a layer of wax for each color until the egg is a large, dark ball covered with thick wax. The design is revealed when the wax is carefully melted away and the egg is wiped clean.

In pre-Christian days *pysanky* were thought to hold magical powers that guaranteed good luck and full harvests, and repelled evil spirits. Often only two colors of dyes were used. After Christianity became dominant in Ukraine, designs and colors took on new symbolic meanings and became more intricate. Sylvia integrates a wide range of colors and images into her *pysanky* designs. These include flowers, hearts, animals, geometric shapes, and strong lines that symbolize longevity, beauty, luck, love, happiness, and rebirth.

Sylvia can demonstrate this art, using eggs she has prepared in advance, in 30 to 60 minutes. However, completing a *pysanky* egg takes at least three hours from beginning to end, depending on the design. Creating a *pysanky* is a relaxing and focused activity. Sylvia’s students have artistic freedom to write any kind of design on the eggs they create, but she anchors her demonstration to traditional Ukrainian themes so that they will learn about the culture and the art form at the same time.

Sylvia also teaches encaustic waxing (using crayons and an iron to create artwork on poster board or other media) and Ukrainian embroidery.

Program Types

Demonstrations or performances; workshops; festival or special event performances or exhibitions.

Language Proficiencies

English, Ukrainian

Fees

Contact to inquire

Availability

Contact to inquire

Audiences

Youth (grades 7-12), college, young adult, adult, seniors

Venues

Libraries and museums, community and senior centers, festivals and fairs

Technical requirements

Contact to inquire

Counties

Statewide

