

Instructor Maria Skaskiw couldn't quite put her finger on why the art of the decorated Ukrainian egg, the pysanka, is so special to her, or why the ancient tradition continues to enthrall. "They have a magic attraction for me," she said while teaching a workshop at the Mount Airy Museum of Regional History on Saturday. And that's the thing about magic, it's by definition indescribable. "They have a hold on me," she said. "I don't consider them my creations. They just take over."

Skaskiw, who has taught typically two workshops per year at the museum for about five years, learned the pysanka art as a child growing up in a Ukrainain community in New York City. "Everyone was doing it," she said, explaining that the ancient art was forbidden while the Soviets ruled the country, but flourished in the United States where immigrants had fled. The craft remains popular with supplies readily available online, so much so that Skaskiw said she recently sent supplies from the United States to her daughter-in-law in the Ukraine. "The first time we did the workshop we didn't realize there would be such an interest," she said. "I just enjoy it so much. I like to see people get excited about it, and I like to see my culture getting out there." With the wax-resist, or batik, process used to decorate the eggs, patterns are drawn on the egg with a stylus that applies melted beeswax. The wax preserves the color underneath when the egg is dipped in a subsequent layer of dye. After each dip, more wax is drawn on to preserve designs in each layer of color. At the end of the process, the artist melts off all the wax, revealing the mutli-colored pattern beneath.

"It's fun," said Cynthia Tunis. "It's very soothing." Tunis, attending her first workshop, noted that her grandfather was of Polish/Ukrainain descent. "My mother did it, but I never got to," she said Of the art. "We marveled over her eggs." ren Nealis, museum administrator who oversees the annual workshop, also participated. She said, "I have a Ukrainian background; that's why I want to learn the ancient way of doing it." "Me too," said Jeannie Studnicki. "It brings us together," said Nealis, who grew up in a Greek Orthodox church. She said the Orthodox church celebrates Easter slightly later than many western churches and recalled taking the decorated eggs to church to be blessed. Kimberly Berrier, there on a day out with her daughter, Kendra Berrier, said, "I think it's cool to learn the history of it."

The art originated in pre-Christian times when Ukrainians worshiped a sun god and decorating the eggs became a powerful spring good-luck ritual. The eggs, considered a magical object, a source of life, were decorated with nature symbols celebrating the rebirth of the earth after winter. After Christianity arrived, religious symbols were incorporated. "It was the sun god waking up in spring, then became the son of god coming back to life," Berrier said. "The son god became the son of god. Which is pretty cool." Laura Hinkley attended her first workshop on Saturday and was hooked. "It's so much better than paper mâché or the other ways of doing

eggs,” Hinkley said. “It’s beautiful.” Hearing her, Skaskiw smiled. “That’s what I like,” she said.