



Jill Ocone

Santa Maria uses a type of stylus called a "kistka" that features a metal cup with a very small hole on the bottom and a point to transfer the wax to the egg after it has been heated by a candle's flame.

The flame's purpose is two-fold as it causes the design to be drawn on the egg then revealed at the end. "The technique requires an understanding of the language of back and forth," Santa Maria clarified. "Artists grow in mastery with the back-and-forth action with the kistka between the candle's flame and the egg."

The process of pysanky begins with selecting the right egg. "Eggs must be smooth and from healthy and happy farm chickens," she explained. "Store-bought eggs are not suitable for pysanky because the shells have evolved to be too thin." Santa Maria owns several types of chickens that produce eggs of various sizes and

colors, and the organic color of each shell creates a different canvas.

Santa Maria also has two beehives on the grounds of her Farmingdale home where she harvests wax to use in her art. "Everything I use is sustainable. I get the eggs from my chickens, the wax from my hives, and I use natural dyes." She works with three types of wax: beeswax, black wax, and white wax, which tends to work better on darker surfaces.

The natural colors of the dyes she orders are more vibrant than dyes she is able to make on her own, and she will water the dye down when she desires a lighter or pastel shade. As a result of years of practice, Santa Maria can draw freehand on an egg with a kistka like she can draw on a piece of paper.



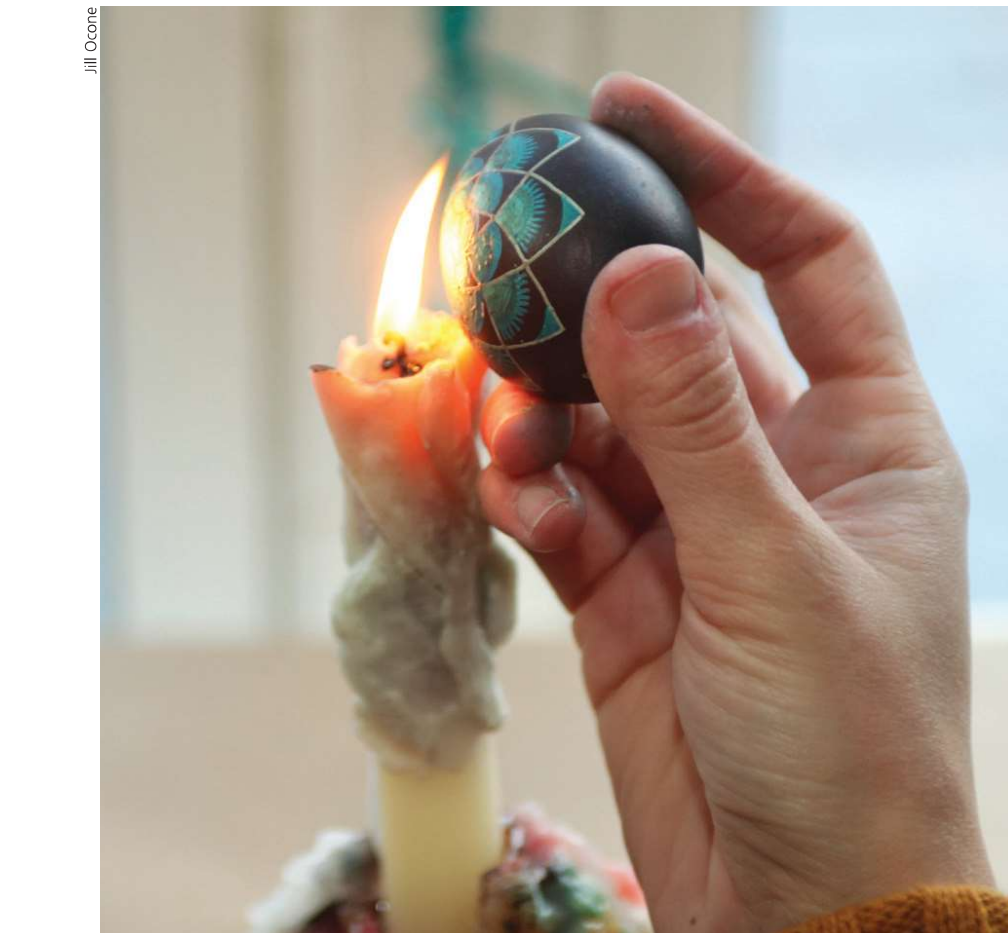
courtesy of Jenny Santa Maria

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After selecting an egg, Santa Maria will fill her kistka with wax and hold it above the flame until it melts as she decides upon a pattern or design. No matter how simple or how intricate and symmetrical, each egg she completes features vivid colors and numerous layers. "If you can write your name, you can do pysanky," she said. She will draw the beginning of the design on the egg with the kistka, then after completing the first design layer, she'll dip the egg into dye and

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