

# Eggs in Art

Eggs as Canvas; Eggs as Symbol

# Egg as Canvas

From ancient times, decorated eggs represented spring, rebirth and fertility.

The oldest eggshells, decorated with engraved hatched patterns, are dated for 60,000 years ago and were found at [Diepkloof Rock Shelter](#) in [South Africa](#).

The [Persian culture](#) also has a tradition of egg decorating, which takes place during the spring [equinox](#). This time marks the Persian New Year, and is referred to as [Nowruz](#). Family members decorate eggs together and place them in a bowl. It is said that it is from this cultural tradition that the Christian practice originates. The tradition of Nowruz, which has its roots in ancient [Zoroastrian](#) tradition, is practiced by Persian and [Turkic](#) peoples of various faiths.



[Punic](#) decorated egg from [Iron Age II](#)

Two decorated ostrich eggs in the British Museum, from the so-called Isis Tomb from Italy's ancient Etruria.

[Jononmac46 / CC BY-SA 3.0](#)



# Pysanky (Ukraine)

In Lviv, a [500-year-old Easter egg](#) was discovered. Also, ceramic eggs have been discovered in Ukraine dating back to 1300 B.C.

The traditional method of drawing intricate patterns on eggs involves a stylus and wax. The word '[pysanka](#)', that we use for naming Easter egg, comes from the Ukrainian word 'pysaty', which means to write. This is because the ornamentation is most commonly applied with a [writing tool](#) (called 'kistka' or 'pysal'tse') through which melted beeswax flows in the same manner as ink flows through a fountain pen.

Pysanky are decorated by a complicated dye process similar to batik. Melted beeswax is applied with a stylus to a fresh egg—raw, and clear of blemishes. The egg is dipped into a succession of dye baths, starting from the lightest, usually yellow, and ending with the darkest, typically black. Between each dipping, wax is applied over areas where the preceding color is to remain. After all the designing is complete, the wax is melted off and a hard glaze is applied. Bees wax is used because it stays liquid longer than paraffin, is more pliable, and has an adhering quality; and, of course, bee-keeping was very common in Ukraine, so a large natural supply was on hand.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dffnbXAlVrQ>













**Ladders**  
prosperity, or  
prayer.



**Pine Needles**  
health, stamina,  
eternal youth.



**Crosses**  
Christ, or the  
Four Corners of  
the World.



**Wheat**  
wishes for good  
health and a  
good harvest.



**The Sun and  
Stars**  
life, fortune,  
growth.



**Deer, Horses,  
and/or Rams**  
wealth and  
prosperity.



**Fish**  
Christianity



**Curls**  
defense or  
protection.



**Roses**  
love, caring.



**Poppies**  
beloved  
Ukrainian art  
motif,  
symbolizing joy  
and beauty.



**Triangles**  
trinities, eg.: air,  
fire, & water;  
the Father, Son,  
& Holy Spirit;  
heaven, earth, &  
hell.



**The Saw**  
fire, life-giving  
heat (also  
known as  
Wolves' teeth,  
symbolizing  
loyalty and  
wisdom).



**Birds**  
fulfillment of  
wishes, and  
fertility. The bird  
is always  
shown at rest,  
never flying.



**Nets**  
Christ's  
reference to  
becoming  
"fishers of  
people".



**Ribbons**  
everlasting life,  
and water.













# Romania

In Bukovina, a northern region of Romania, the Easter tradition of dyeing eggs has been elevated into an art form. Filmmaker Titus-Armand Napirlica along with production company Jungles in Paris profiles the beautiful work of Elena Craciunescu in *The Egg Painter*. Craciunescu is one of a dozen egg painters in the small village of Ciocănești. The town's buildings feature elaborate motifs, which are reflected in the decorated eggs. Using a process similar to batik, Craciunescu uses an iron-tipped stick, called a kishitze, to apply a wax design onto a clean and drained egg. She then dips the egg into a dye bath and repeats the process of "painting" with wax and submerging it into other dyes to create a layering effect. The wax acts as a shield between each dye bath, allowing the egg to retain color from the previous dip. In the final stage the egg is held up to a heat source that melts the wax and leaves behind a stunning pattern.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KKBgFWo6JM4>



# Hungary: Egg Shoeing

**Egg shoeing** is an **egg** decorating technique. According to **Hungarian** oral traditions, **egg shoeing** was invented by village blacksmiths to prove their skills by creating an **egg** which was shod by miniature **horseshoes**.

The current world record holder of egg shoeing is the [Hungarian](#) József Koszpek, who used 1119 pieces in decorating an [ostrich egg](#). He also holds various related records: 34 pieces of iron on a shoed [parrot](#) egg, 146 pieces of iron on shoed [chicken](#) eggs, 35 pieces of iron on shod [goose](#) eggs, 598 pieces of iron on shoed [emu](#) eggs.

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ahzMbe7tG00&t=56s>







Míves Tojás Múzeum  
Fotó :Vajda Tamás©





**Hoof Blog Easter Egg**



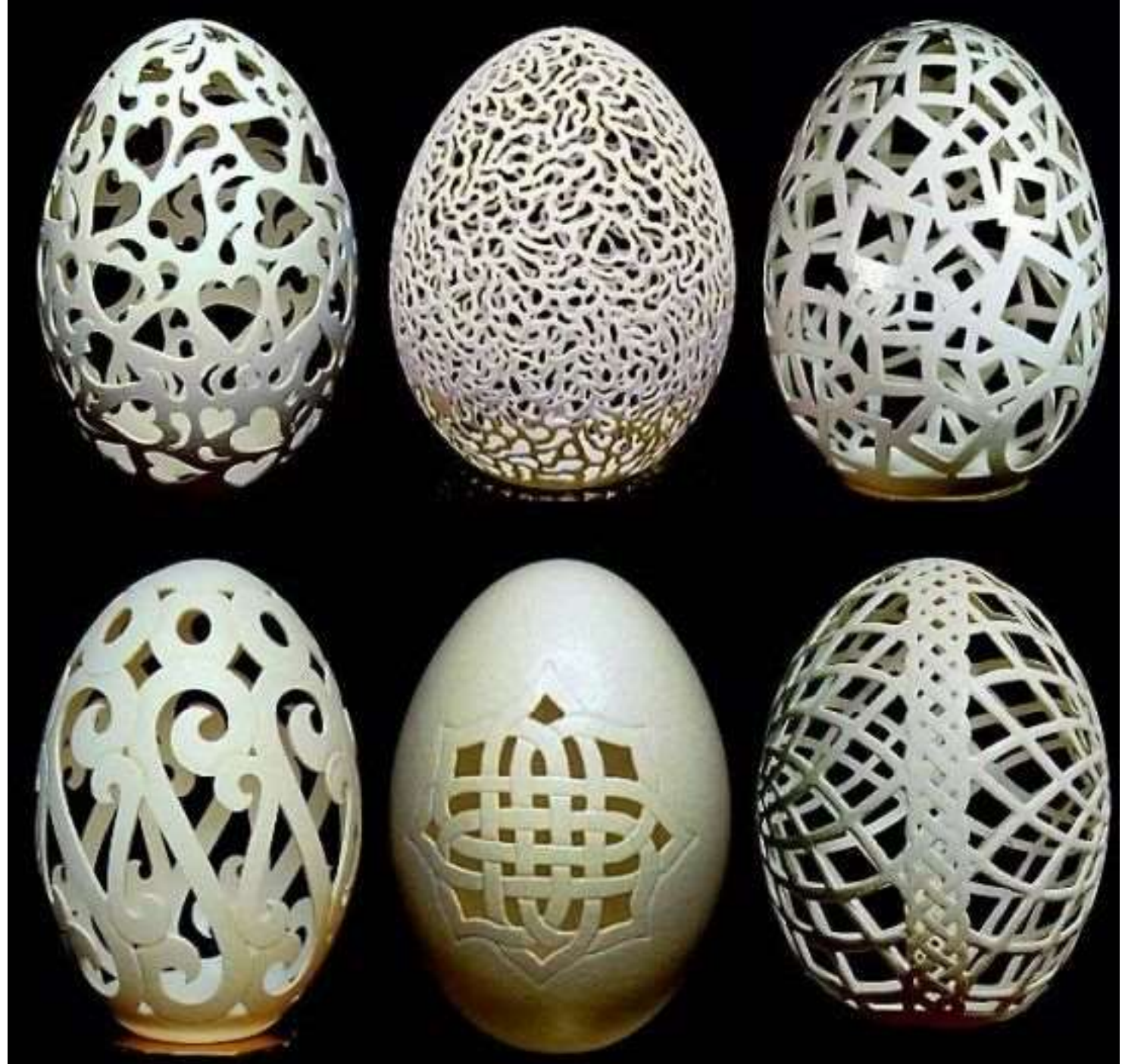


# Egg Carving

**Egg Carving** is a delicate art form using delicate and precise tools to gently **carve** and cut away at the shell.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yliccsNUEmQ>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H30R9xiqvFI>











Emu egg carving



# Faberge Eggs

A **Fabergé egg** is a jewelled egg created by the [jewellery](#) firm [House of Fabergé](#), in [Saint Petersburg, Russian Empire](#). Possibly as many as 69 were created, of which 57 survive today. Virtually all were manufactured under the supervision of [Peter Carl Fabergé](#) between 1885 and 1917. The most famous are his 52 "Imperial" eggs, 46 of which survive, made for the Russian Tsars [Alexander III](#) and [Nicholas II](#) as Easter gifts for their wives and mothers.

Before [Easter](#) 1885, Alexander III's brother [Grand Duke Vladimir Alexandrovich](#) suggested that [Peter Carl Fabergé](#) create a jeweled egg.<sup>[4]</sup> This type egg is believed to have been inspired by an ivory hen egg made for the Danish Royal Collection in the 18th century.<sup>[5]</sup> Known as the [Hen Egg](#), it has a 2.5 inch outer enamel shell and a golden band around the middle.<sup>[6]</sup> The egg opens to reveal a golden "[yolk](#)" within, which opened to reveal a golden [hen](#) sitting on golden [straw](#).<sup>[6]</sup> Inside the hen lay a miniature diamond replica of the Imperial crown and a ruby [pendant](#),<sup>[6]</sup> though these two elements have been lost.<sup>[7]</sup> It was given to the tsarina on 1 May 1885.<sup>[5]</sup> The egg cost 4,151 rubles.<sup>[2]</sup> Six weeks later, the tsar made Fabergé the supplier to the Imperial Court.<sup>[8]</sup>

Maria was so delighted by the gift that Alexander appointed Fabergé a "goldsmith by special appointment to the Imperial Crown" and commissioned another egg the next year. After that, [Peter Carl Fabergé](#) was apparently given complete freedom to design future imperial Easter eggs, and their designs became more elaborate. According to Fabergé family lore, not even the Tsar knew what form they would take—the only requirements were that each contain a surprise, and that each be unique. Once Fabergé had approved an initial design, the work was carried out by a team of craftsmen.

After Alexander III's death on 1 November 1894, his son, Nicholas II, presented a Fabergé egg to both his wife, Alexandra Fedorovna, and his mother, the Dowager Empress Maria Fedorovna. Records have shown that of the 50 imperial Easter eggs, 20 were given to the former and 30 to the latter. Eggs were made each year except 1904 and 1905, during the [Russo-Japanese War](#).

- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M67LPSU\\_vdk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M67LPSU_vdk)
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oUO8YIpDvSo>
- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B3dVjDJR\\_rl](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B3dVjDJR_rl)
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=focZICUp5c0> (17 mins)
- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o\\_x1UG7wGQE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o_x1UG7wGQE) (mosaic egg)



# First Hen Egg



The **First Hen** egg or **Jeweled Hen** egg is an Imperial [Fabergé egg](#). It became the first in a series of more than 50 such jeweled eggs made under the supervision of [Peter Carl Fabergé](#) for the Russian Imperial family. It was delivered to Tsar [Alexander III](#) and given to his wife [Maria Feodorovna](#) in 1885. The tsarina enjoyed the egg so much that Alexander III quickly placed a standing order with Fabergé to create a new egg for his wife every Easter thereafter, requiring only that each egg be unique and that it contain some kind of "surprise" within it. This particular egg is now a part of the permanent collection of the [Fabergé Museum in Saint Petersburg, Russia](#)

























# Egg as Symbol

The egg has always held particular symbolic significance, partly because it is a visual shorthand for new life and un-hatched potential. The egg brings hope and purity. It is a symbol of fertility and the circle of life. In some Asian cultures the egg is seen as a symbol of luck and wealth.

**“To a human eye the egg has many attractive features: its tapered shape gives the impression of being grounded where a simple sphere always threatens to float away”**

The egg is “simple and universal.”



# Hieronymus Bosch





# Concert in the Egg

*Concert in the Egg* was once considered by scholars to be a long lost Bosch painting. In recent years, however, it's been attributed to Gielis Panhadel, who was greatly inspired by Bosch's egg work. The group of singers form the "yolk" of the egg, which symbolizes "fool" as in "[yokel](#)". The eel resembles a form of beer (ale). The scene is reminiscent of the similar [Ship of Fools](#). One of the singers is so intent on his song (pointing towards the book) that he fails to notice that he is being robbed by the lute player.



# Frans Hals

Frans Hals was a 17th century Dutch painter known for group portraiture. Here, he depicts [Shrovetide](#), the celebration period before Lent that we now call [Mardi Gras](#). What's most interesting here is the garland of salted fish and eggs. It's meant to be some sort of sexual innuendo.





# Zurbaran

## Birth of the Virgin (c. 1627)

Just as striking as Zurbarán's color scheme are his rich, descriptive treatment of the drapery, and the solid masses of his figures. He has arranged the composition in an airy, oval sweep to reveal the subtle play of light and shade. The woman standing at the right in contemporary costume is believed to be a portrait of the donor because she gazes directly toward the spectator. The eggs in her basket allude to the purity of the Virgin and to the Resurrection.







# Valasquez

## **Old Woman Frying Eggs (1618)**

There is a serious, meditative quality about the woman's figure, and the boy with the melon under his arm and a carafe of wine in his hand looks out of the picture at us with comparable gravity. The contrast of youth and age conveys the transience of life, and the egg in the woman's hand suggests associations, familiar at the time, with the mutability of all earthly matter and with another life beyond the grave. The background is dark and indistinct, in contrast to the often over-crowded backgrounds of Dutch kitchen scenes.



# Jean-Baptiste Greuze

In this painting by Jean-Baptiste Greuze, a girl sits sullen in the corner, [feeling ashamed](#). Her basket of eggs has broken, and her family is angry about it. The broken eggs are meant to represent the loss of her virginity. Her brother in the corner there is trying to repair the broken pieces because he is still innocent.





# Salvador Dali

In the *Metamorphosis of Narcissus*, Dali re-tells the Greek myth of Narcissus, the man who fell in love with his own reflection and died of frustration when he found he was not able to embrace himself. Pitying his plight, the God's immortalized him as the Narcissus flower, which can be seen sprouting from the egg in this painting.

For Dali, the egg usually plays a hopeful role, often coming to symbolize new beginnings or purity amidst the surrounding chaos. In the *Metamorphosis of Narcissus*, Dali splits his canvas into the four-parts of the story, subtly delineated by changes of tone and construction. The egg appears in the fourth and final story element. A cold grey hand holds the egg aloft, out of the water. From it's shell a single, beautiful Narcissus flower has emerged. In this image the egg has become a symbol of hope and rebirth, it is the vessel from which Narcissus may begin again, its smooth shell hiding the mechanics by which new birth occurs.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YIFsdVPXMnE>





This painting was initially inspired by what Dalí called an “intra-uterine memory.” Of this experience, Dalí states, “all enchantment for me was in my eyes and the most splendid...vision [while in the womb] was that of a pair of eggs fried in a pan without a pan...” Dalí claims that he could conjure this intrauterine memory whenever he wished by applying pressure with his fingers to his eyes, stimulating his phosphenes to create bright visual images. In this painting Dalí reproduces the colors that remind him of his mother’s womb: “the intra-uterine paradise was the color of hell...red, orange, yellow, and bluish, the color of flames...”

The egg suspended on a string represents an embryo attached by the umbilical cord in the fiery orange world, while the shape also suggests a limp phallus. The dripping watch hanging on the lichen covered wall, whose shape mimics the embryonic yoke, is a “soft watch” variant which already had become a Dalinian trademark (representing the fluidness and irrelevance of time in the artist’s dreamy Port Lligat).

A second inspiration for the painting was Dalí’s desire to pay tribute to Gala. He was reluctant to paint her likeness and instead focused on one of her celebrated attributes – her gaze. The muse to many Surrealists during the 1920s, part of Gala’s power was her unblinking gaze, described by husband Paul Éluard as, “so intense it could pierce walls.” In this work, Dalí makes a surreal metaphoric leap by painting the eggs on the plate with a shimmer he likens to his muse’s piercing gaze.



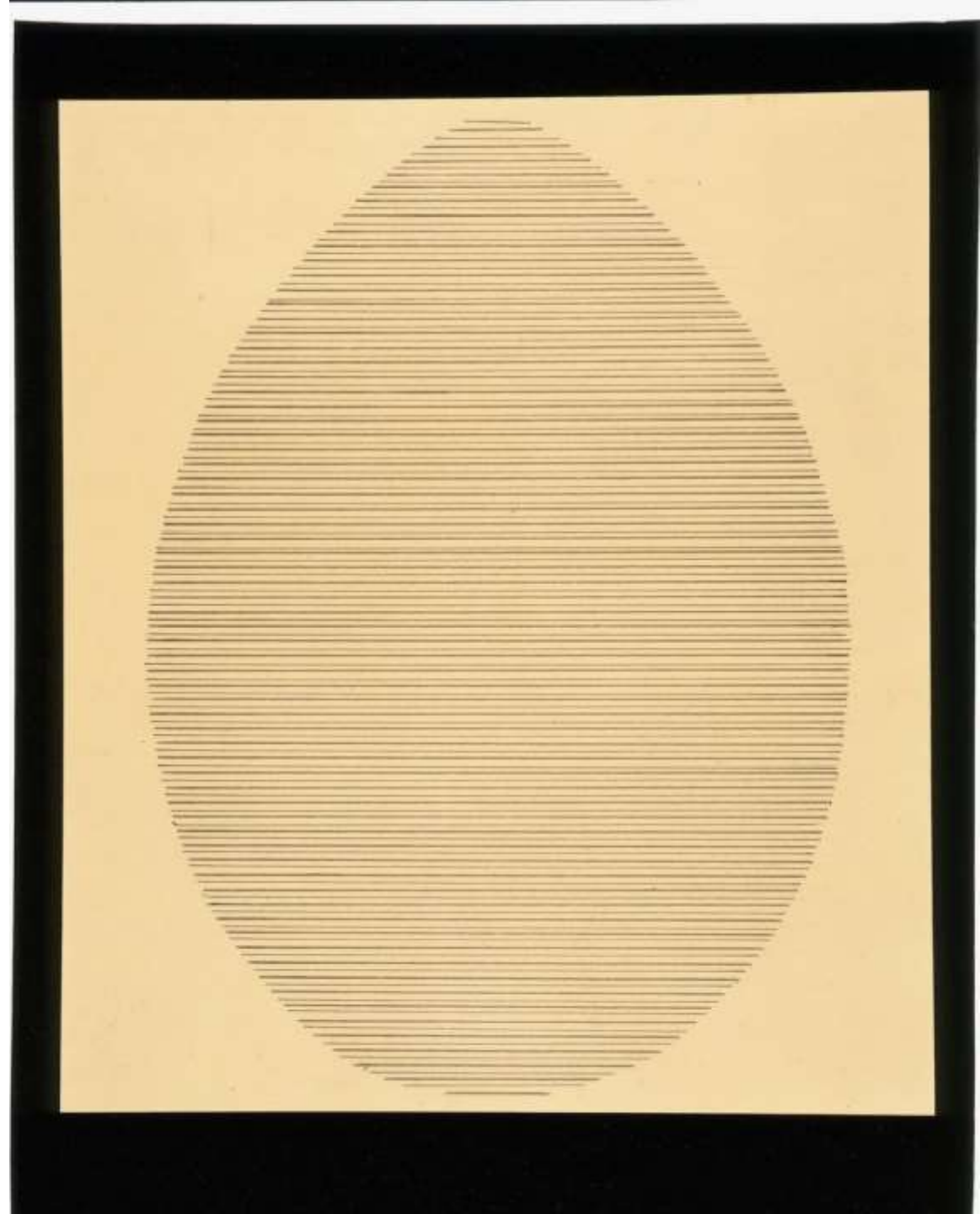


Salvador Dali, Egg at the Dali Theatre Museum.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vpiJ-t7LMMI>

Salvador Dali, who crenelated the walls of his museum with huge, anxiously balanced eggs (and also enjoyed eating and painting them), thought they were the perfect symbol for everything from eyes to rebirth, to the world and its perfection.

According to perceptual psychologists the brain likes visual simplicity, balance and the impression that something is contained. To a human eye the egg has many attractive features: its tapered shape gives the impression of being grounded where a simple sphere always threatens to float away; its smooth curves are the antithesis of hostile or edgy; and there's something comfortingly complete about it. Meditative minimalist painter [Agnes Martin](#), who considered her works expressions of calm but profound joy, occasionally abandoned her usual squares to experiment with egg-shaped works, filling the symmetrical ovoid with her delicate lines.





# Claes Oldenburg

Claes Oldenburg, whose pioneering pop “soft sculptures” irreverently explored commodity and consumption in the 1960s, was also a fan of the egg. His inflatable *Sculpture in the Form of a Fried Egg* (1966/71) was his largest experiment with the floppy, flappy fried-egg form. For Oldenburg, a great deal of the egg’s appeal lay in its unsophisticated mundanity—the closest eggs come to sophistication is being whipped into meringue, and even that is frankly verging on camp. From the soft fabric *Fried Eggs Under Cover* (1962) to the hard plaster *Fried Egg in Pan* (1961), Oldenburg was repeatedly drawn to the breakfast icon throughout his career



Claes Oldenburg, American, b. Sweden, 1929 *Sculpture in the Form of a Fried Egg*, 1966/1971  
Canvas, dyed cotton, and expanded polystyrene  
Diameter: 122 in. (309.9 cm)





Bridging the gap between painting and sculpture, Claes Oldenburg is considered one of the most important artists of the 20th century for his interest in everyday objects and food. Eggs factor into many of his works, including *False Food Selection* and [\*Fried Eggs Under Cover\*](#), but one of my favorites is his [\*Sculpture in the Form of a Fried Egg\*](#).





# Carole Itter x Taki Bluesinger, Raw Egg Costume, 1974

How do you like your eggs in the morning? Well, Canadian artist Carole Itter and Japanese photographer Taki Bluesinger like theirs raw, giant and all-encompassing. Chickens, eggs and nests are a persistent theme in Itter's work, which spans collage, sculpture, writing and performance. Her obsession began when she rented a cabin on a poultry farm in Robert's Creek, British Columbia in the early '70s. Thereafter, she and Bluesinger created and captured many chicken-themed performances, featuring this costume.





Urs Fischer, (left) *Half a Problem*, 2013

**Urs Fischer** (born 2 May 1973) is a Swiss-born contemporary visual artist living in New York City. Fischer's practice includes sculpture, installation and photography.



Perhaps another reason we're so drawn to the egg is its similarity to the shape of a human face. There's something oddly existential, for instance, about the fact that clowns claim their official "persona", by painting their exclusive "face" on an eggshell which is then kept in an archive for reference—a process which is mercilessly inverted in Fischer's *Problem Paintings* series, in which an old Hollywood headshot has an egg—whole and smooth, cut in half, cracked or just raw—obscuring the face. Clowns are a good reminder that eggs are also inherently funny, and just a little bit gross. There's something so undignified about them, whether they're flapping around on a spatula on the way to a plate, or being smashed over the head of an offensive politician.

Luke Stephenson, *Cha-Cha the Clown*, from *The Clown Egg Register*, 2018





# Judy Chicago and Miriam Shapiro: *Womanhouse* (1972)

In direct response to the political landscape of the era, artists Judy Chicago and Miriam Shapiro formed the first ever feminist art program at CalArts. During this time they worked on *Womanhouse*, an immersive art show staged throughout a home. The kitchen was designed by the artist Vicki Hodgetts and featured fried eggs meant to look like breasts tacked to the wall. It is of course a commentary on “a woman’s place is in the kitchen.”

<https://mcachicago.org/Publications/Websites/West-By-Midwest/Research/Topics/Womanhouse>





# Christopher Chiappa: Livestrong (2015)

a visual so strong it's practically synesthetic.

American artist [Christopher Chiappa](#) created a [hyperreal installation](#) made of 7,000 fried eggs for his solo exhibition 'Livestrong' at [Kate Werble Gallery](#) in New York City. Over the course of five years, Chiappa casted, poured and sanded the small [sculptures](#), which are now put on the walls and floors of the gallery space, in his own studio.

In a statement from the gallery, it says: "The humble contours of each egg are enveloped by the cumulative and unnerving energy of the group. The group mentality here is, as in many large gatherings, difficult to define. Is it a friendly crowd, a humorous displacement of the everyday? Or, is it an infestation – an angry mob, mold, or cancer, metastasizing?" The exhibition will run until January 9, 2016. Living and working in Long Island City, Chiappa specializes in sculpture as well as painting.



# Sarah Lucas

Sarah Lucas has been using eggs in her work for over 30 years and can be credited, at least in recent memory, with making fried eggs cool. [\*One Thousand Eggs "For Women"\*](#) is a traveling performance inspired by Easter egg tosses that encourages visitors to throw eggs against a wall. But her most well-known egg piece is her self-portrait with fried eggs as breasts, which is meant to subvert notions of femininity through her defiant stance. You can see both pieces at this year's [survey of Lucas' work](#) at the New Museum in New York.

<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/sarah-lucas-2643/introduction-sarah-lucas>



# Soshiro Matsubara

Hokkaido-born [Soshiro Matsubara](#) made this photo by adding acrylic paint to eggs in 2014. It represents the ongoing playful legacy of eggs in art and, in the age of Instagram, a beloved image that has since gone viral.





# Assignment Suggestions...

- Decorate or embellish eggs (real, wooden, or plastic)
- Practice batik or natural dyes
- Create an artwork with a “surprise”
- Create an artwork inspired by pasanka patterns
- Incorporate eggs or egg shapes in an artwork