



LITHUANIAN

FOLK ART

BY

RAMUTE



THE ARTIST

Ramute Plioplys was born in Toronto, Ontario, Canada in 1953. At the age of three she contracted polio, leaving her legs partially paralyzed. Having moved to Chicago with her family in 1964, she graduated Maria High School and then the University of Chicago. She earns her living in the field of accounting.

Ramute has devoted much of her free time to activities within the Lithuanian community. She was the director of the Lithuanian Pedagogical Institute (part of the Lithuanian educational system with classes conducted exclusively on Saturdays) from 1982 to 1986 and continues to teach a course on problems of bilingualism to the present. In 1994 she translated Prof. Z. Zinkevičius' "The History of the Lithuanian Language" into English (to be published in 1995). She has been to Lithuania seven times and spent two years in Vilnius pursuing her interests in linguistics, as well as those in traditional folk art and customs.

Ramute's interest in Lithuanian folk art began as a child when her mother taught her to weave traditional sashes (at the age of eight). She also began making straw ornaments, initially from paper drinking straws, but later she returned to the natural and delicate rye straws originally used in Lithuania. Because rye is difficult to find in the Chicago area, she now grows her own rye in her backyard.

Her interest in Lithuanian folk art also extended to decorating eggs. She mastered the batik style (also known as the wax pattern or wax-resist method) of decorating eggs in the mid-1970's and began making hanging eggs in the mid-1980's.

LITHUANIAN DECORATED EGGS

The egg has always been a main food staple for man and in ancient times it also acquired a deeper mystical significance. It was naturally regarded as the source of life and, therefore, came to be associated with many traditional Lithuanian folkloric customs. In earlier times in Lithuania, eggs were decorated and exchanged not only at Easter, but also on the feast of St. George and during Whitsuntide (Sekminės). The egg was believed to be a charm which offered protection against evil spirits, spells, accidents, sickness, death and other misfortunes. When the eggs were colored and decorated, they were imbued with additional power and meaning. For example, the color red was believed to protect man from evil spirits. The patterns used to embellish the eggs symbolized the sun, moon, stars, love, devotion and more. Since decorated eggs were systematically collected in Lithuania for the first time only in the 19th century, the true meaning of the various patterns can now only be conjectured. However, these early collections reflect patterns which had been passed down from generation to generation and have very ancient roots. It is these patterns which serve as the basis for the designs created by Ramute in her hanging decorated eggs.

THE EASTER TREE

The Easter tree was traditional in certain regions of Lithuania. Branches of budding trees were collected in the springtime and then adorned with decorated hanging eggs. The eggs represented a heavenly divinity, while the budding branches symbolized an earthly one.

HANGING BIRDS

In Lithuanian folklore the bird has always played a very important role. By soaring in the heavens, it was seen as a mediator between the gods and man. By laying eggs, it was seen as the giver of life. Its ability to migrate and then return made the peasants view it as an intelligent creature not bound by earthly territorial boundaries and, in more recent times, it naturally came to symbolize freedom. All of this, and more, imbued the bird with a mythical significance which then found form in many aspects of Lithuanian folk art. One such expression is the hanging bird whose body is a decorated egg.

DRILLED AND ETCHED EGGS

With the availability of modern technology Ramute has found new expressions for the traditional wax patterns of Lithuanian decorated eggs by drilling the "tear drops" and "dots" into the delicate egg shells, and also by etching the eggs (by combining the batik method with an acid bath) to create subtle raised layer variations of Lithuanian traditional patterns.

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Ramute Plioplys was born in Toronto, Canada in 1953. Her mother introduced her to Lithuanian folk art at the age of eight by teaching her to weave traditional sashes and later fostered her interest in other forms of folk art. In the mid-1970's she mastered the batik form of decorating eggs.

Since ancient times the egg had a mystical significance in Lithuanian culture. It was the symbol of life and was believed to be a charm offering protection against evil spirits, spells, accidents,

sickness, death and other misfortunes. When the eggs were decorated and dyed they were imbued with additional power.

Likewise, the bird, by soaring in the heavens, was believed to mediate between the gods and man and became an integral part of folkloric traditions. In more recent times it gained the additional significance of symbolizing freedom.

Ramute Plioplys continues these ancient traditions with her decorated eggs, birds and a modern drilled variation of the wax patterned eggs.

THE HANUKKAH BIRD

In Lithuanian tradition, the egg is a symbol of life, a decorated egg - the symbol of a beautiful life and the bird - a symbol of freedom.

In Jewish tradition, the egg also signifies life and good luck and the bird - divine presence and freedom.

There are 18 flames, for the Festival of Lights, on each wing and on the tail. The chai symbol on the egg, as well as the 18 flames signify good luck, life and longevity.

The pattern on the egg is done in blue and white: blue signifying divine glory and protection as well as heaven, white signifying holiness and purity.

The silver and gold flame on the egg represents the eternal light, which is symbolic of God's presence, radiating its light in all directions during this Festival of Lights.

The Star of David on the egg signifies good luck, honor and Jewish identity.

(Do not hang in direct sunlight.
Direct sunlight will bleach the colors.)