

Christopher Kline

Labyrinths

29·06 – 27·07·13

Opening Reception  
Saturday 29/06/13  
19:00 - 21:00

Opening Hours  
Tuesday - Saturday  
12:00 - 18:00

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## EGGS

After night falls, the women congregate around kitchen tables with their wax and candles and kystkas and set to work. The men are often banished from the house while this work goes on and the patterns and color combinations are carefully guarded, passed down from mother to daughter. Writing pysanka dates back to ancient times though no examples exist due to the eggs' fragility. They were initially created as talismans for sun-worshipping rituals, and later syncretized into Christian practice, shifting from a symbol of the rites-of-spring to the resurrection of Man.

Many symbols remained unchanged, such as the spiral motif, thought to be the most powerful because they could be used to trap demons and other unholy creatures within their infinite shape. Later they were banned as religious practice under communist rule and entire museum collections were destroyed by Soviet cadres, the tradition living on predominantly through diasporan practice in North America.



fig 1. - Pysanka Eggs  
(a.k.a. Ukrainian Easter Eggs)

## II

### MONUMENTS



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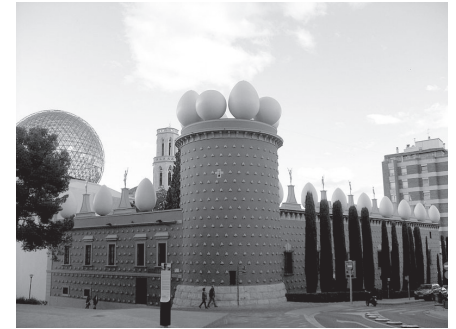
fig 2. Vegreville Egg, Alberta, Canada

fig 3. Dalí Museum, Figueres, Catalonia

fig 4. The Egg, Empire State Plaza, Albany, New York

While in English the egg carries mostly ovarian and motherly connotations, in other languages a more testicular association remains prominent. In a true show of *maleness*, the largest "pysanka egg" in the world now exists in Canada, created out of anodized aluminum by an artist of Ukrainian descent named Paul Maxum Sembaliuk.

As if the perversity of having to out-do all previously existing pysanka eggs whose essence is their fragility, humility and ephemerality by making a permanent, nine meter, two ton version weren't enough, in keeping with the masculine tradition of honoring power and fear through violence with huge constructions, the egg was erected as a monument to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.



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Male artists such as Kippenberger and Dalí have long honed in on the egg, the latter devoting fourteen years to creating a museum of his own work adorned with a couple dozen of his giant eggs. But it was Nelson Rockefeller who had the resources to truly realize his megalomaniacal egg vision. During a visit from Princess Beatrix of the Netherlands to explore the Dutch history of New York State's capital region, Governor Rockefeller felt embarrassed of Albany, especially during their limo ride through "The Gut", a low-income immigrant neighborhood of about 9,000 people. It is said that it was after this brush with royalty that Rockefeller resolved to build something monumental, more fitting to the grandeur of his administration. The Gut was completely razed along with its shops and churches after a combination of forced and paid evictions using eminent domain laws. 17 years and 2 billion dollars later, the ribbon was cut on the **Governor Nelson A. Rockefeller Empire State Plaza**, an enormous high-modern dystopian complex, its odd focal point being "The Egg", a giant theatre which has become the icon of Albany's now fairly fascist-looking skyline.



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### III

## LABYRINTHS



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fig 5. Ancient Greek depiction of Theseus slaying the Minotaur  
fig 6. Jack Torrence in *The Shining*, 1980  
fig 7. Jim Henson's *Labyrinth*, 1986

The original labyrinth was built by Daedalus upon the order of King Minos in order to imprison his wife's son, the flesh-eating Minotaur, who was fathered by a bull after a long series of strange events. It is said that even Daedalus could barely find his way out of the labyrinth after he created it. Every seventh year Minos would send seven maidens and seven Athenian youths into the labyrinth as a sacrifice to the Minotaur. The brave Theseus elected to slay the monster and to find his way back out of the labyrinth was secretly given a ball of thread by Minos' daughter Ariadne who had fallen in love with him. Many different versions of this story exist, and although the ruins of Minos' palace have been found, the labyrinth's existence remains a mystery. Some have also posited that the Minotaur and Minos are in fact the same being and that legend of his labyrinthine palace of many rooms and hallways was embellished and distorted over time into a maze.

The labyrinth is a key feature in two 1980s films in which this kind of uncomfortable male megalomania is again taken to extremes. First in Kubrick's 1980 *The Shining*, a hedge maze on the grounds of the Overlook Hotel (built upon an Indian burial site) serves as a day-outing for mother and child as Jack Torrence, the writer father, chillingly watches over them walking through a scale model inside of the hotel. Later, as Jack's descent into supernatural madness climaxes with an attempt at filicide, the blizzard-filled labyrinth again serves as the setting for the son's escape from his father's murderous hand, reversing the role of the minotaur as Jack freezes to death, lost in the labyrinth.

Jim Henson's 1986 commercial failure and final feature film of his life *Labyrinth* centers around Jareth the Goblin King (played by who better than legendary narcissist David Bowie) and his kidnapping of the baby brother of the film's protagonist, a 14 year old girl named Sarah. After a movie's worth of confusing motivations and intentions, Sarah reaches the center of the labyrinth kingdom where Jareth's true intentions become clear as he attempts to seduce her into staying there with him forever. She thwarts his plan simply by remembering a line from a fictional play (titled *The Labyrinth*) she had trouble memorizing for homework at the beginning of the film, "You have no power over me".



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## IV

### CRAZY QUILTS

The rote mechanics involved in quilting and the fact that, unlike handicrafts such as knitting or embroidery, many people can work on a piece at the same time encouraged much dialog between women and the quilting bee became a forum for trading tips, designs, recipes, and discussing religion, politics, and life in general. Due to this social nature imbued with a sense of purpose, quilting had become one of the central activities for American women in the 19th century.

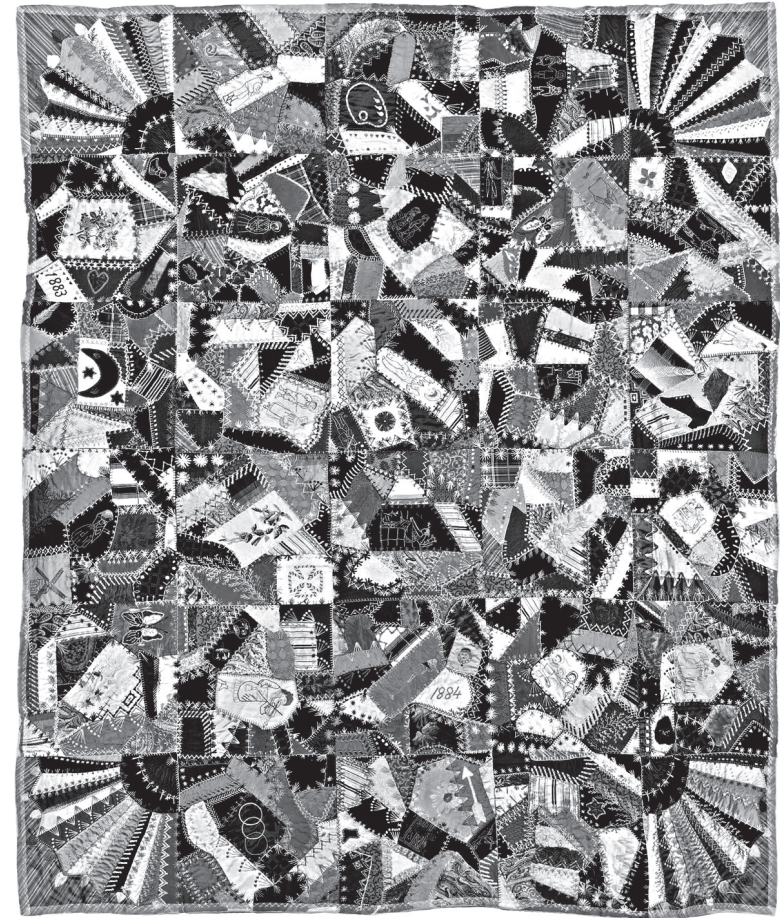
In the early 1880s "Crazy Quilts" exploded in popularity with women's magazines heralding them as a bold and daring development coinciding with the Decorative Art craze of the era. Their seemingly random piecing, lack of pattern, bright colors and visually overwhelming effect garnered them the label "Crazy Quilts", which is still the official nomenclature, though the works are often not quilts in a technical sense, lacking the batting and stitching through the top and bottom layer which defines quilt-making.

As Quilting Hall of Famer Sally Garoutte has noted: "Better than swooning, better than nervous breakdowns, better than gin or patent medicines, Crazy Quilts were American women's answer to the constrictions of the Victorian age."

These heirlooms were often particularly sentimental, including pieces of wedding dresses, prize ribbons, old clothing, and embroidered names, dates, and places of the family or community making it. This imbues many of them with a strange nostalgia of a lost time, the fabric itself carrying a great many stories and past-lives.

By 1887 the fad was over and *Godey's Ladies' Book* proclaimed in December of that year, "We regretted much the time and energy spent on the most childish, and unsatisfactory of all work done with the needle, 'crazy' patchwork."

fig 8. Crazy Quilt, 1883



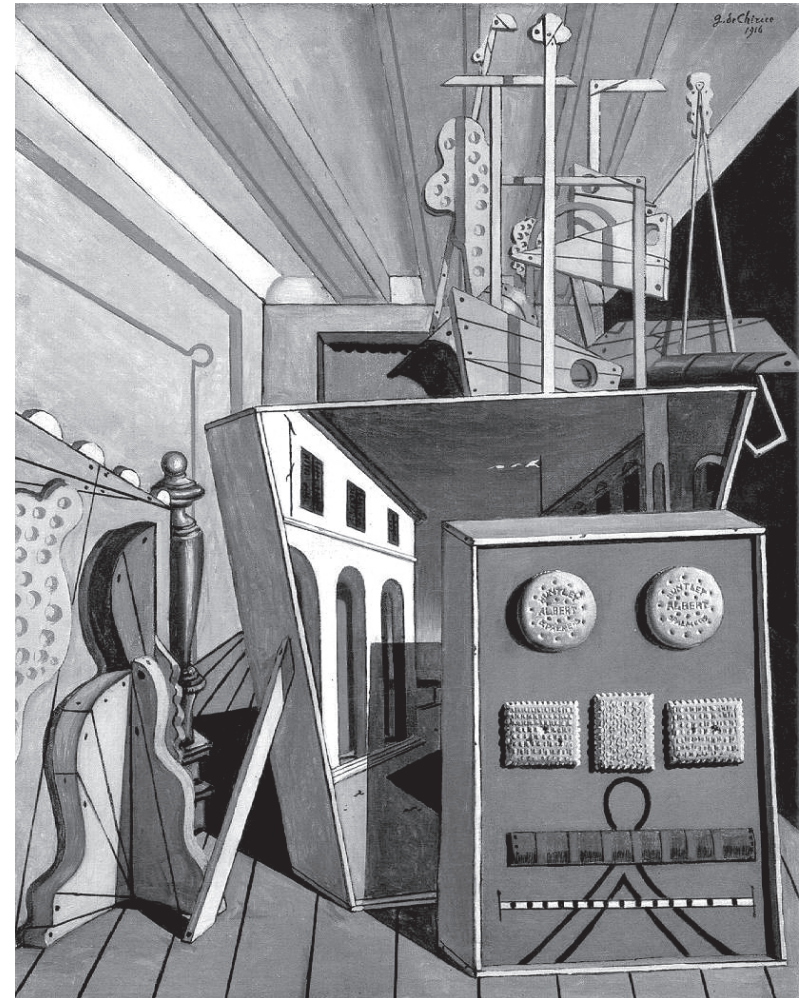


# V

## METAPHYSICS

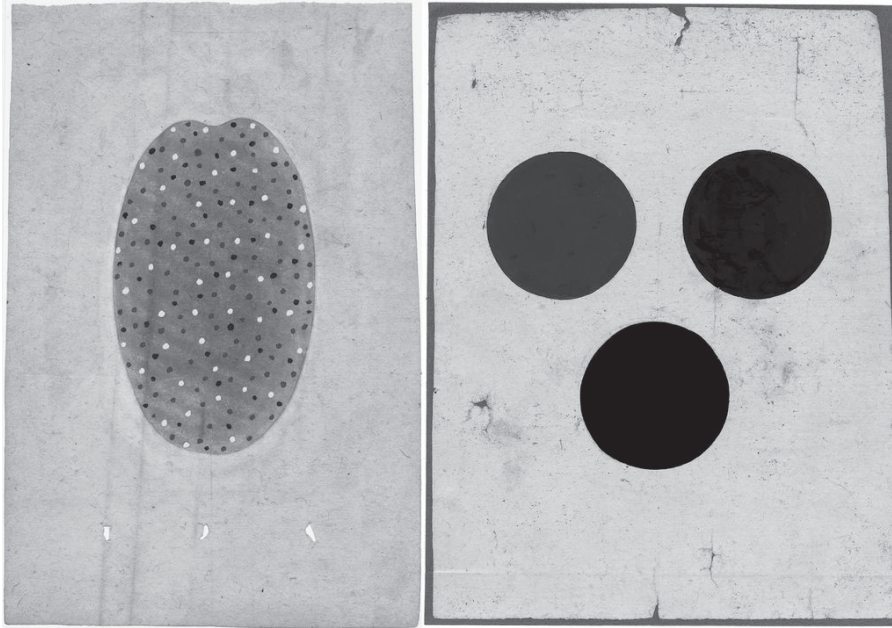
Giorgio de Chirico and Carlo Carrá formally established the tenants of Pittura Metafisica (Metaphysical Painting) in 1917, focusing their attention on the inner-life of the object, painting that which can't be seen. Their work, in sharp contrast to the Futurists at the time, presided along the dislocation between the past and the present. As the fascists were rewriting history, paving over it, promoting war as "the only hygiene of the world", De Chirico longed for a return to classic grandeur. "What shall I love if not the enigma."

fig 9. Giorgio de Chirico - *Interno metafisico con biscotti*, 1916



# VI

## THE TRANCE STATE AND ARTISTRY



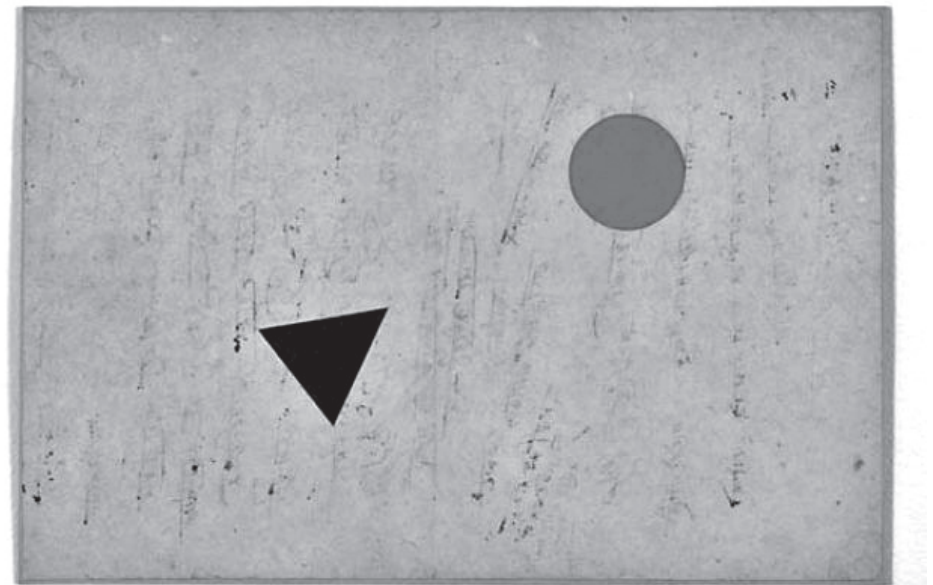
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fig 10 & 11. Tantric drawings from *Tantra Song*

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"One does not freely create divine images; nor does one improvise the mantras which are the phonetic form of these deities. The Hindu maker of divine images is not an artist, but a craftsman, a shilpin. A shilpin however can be artistically gifted, thus giving birth to beautiful images which, though fashioned according to a canonical set of rules, are able to arouse emotions or even to fill with wonder those who see them. ... They are things of beauty, a 'joy forever,' and thus very much capable, we may believe, to become supports of cosmic visions. They would also have been, when most abstract, the starting point of aniconic meditations."

– André Padoux from his essay *Of Images & Beauty in Tantra Song*



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## VII

### JOINT SNAKES

"Yep. I've seed them too. They look like these here old king snakes—kind'a spotted—an' when y'hit one, it'll break up in pieces about as long as yer finger. Just like you had cut it up. And if y'leave it there 'til th' next mornin', it will be a snake again. That's a funny snake t'me. I've seed a lot of'em down here.

"That's the funniest thing I ever did know—how they done that. But they'll grow back t'gether. They'll just fall all t'pieces like somethin' y'break, y'know. That way you'd think y'killed him. I don't know what they *would* do if you was t'move one a'them pieces."

– Harv Reid of Rabun Gap, Georgia, as interviewed in *The Foxfire Book*