

Elaine Eff

Painted Screens' Chronicler and Preservationist

Bio

Elaine Eff took on the painted screens as their chronicler and protector in graduate school. As a student of Folk Art and Museum Studies in Cooperstown NY, she discovered that Baltimore's iconic folk art was not only unique to our city in the 20th century but that it had far-flung precedents across America in the Victorian Era and earlier. Her simple paper launched a lifelong career to locate examples and unearth information about their origins worldwide as well as local inventors and practitioners. In 1985, she and screen painter Dee Herget launched The Painted Screen Society originally as a guild for painters and then a membership organization, conducting workshops and exhibitions locally and nationally. Their 1988 documentary film *The Screen Painters* featured many of the early artists descending from the East Monument Street Art Shop of William Oktavec, the art form's local inventor who tell their story better than anyone.

Eff received a PhD in Folklore and Folklife from the University of Pennsylvania. Her dissertation became the basis for the 2013 book *The Painted Screens of Baltimore: An Urban Folk Art Revealed* (University Press of Mississippi). She served as Baltimore City Folklorist and later as Maryland State Folklorist with the Maryland Historical Trust and State Arts Council for almost three decades, discovering and sharing the joys of traditional arts statewide. Research and other material related to the Society and Maryland Traditions are archived at the University of Maryland Baltimore County (UMBC) Special Collections. Eff continues to work to insure the future of the painted screens of Baltimore.

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