

# ISEIVIJOS DAILE: Tarp Prisirisimo ir Issilaisvinimo

## ART OF THE DIASPORA: Between Attachment and Freedom

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Published by the Institute of Culture, Philosophy and Art, Vilnius, Lithuania, 2003.

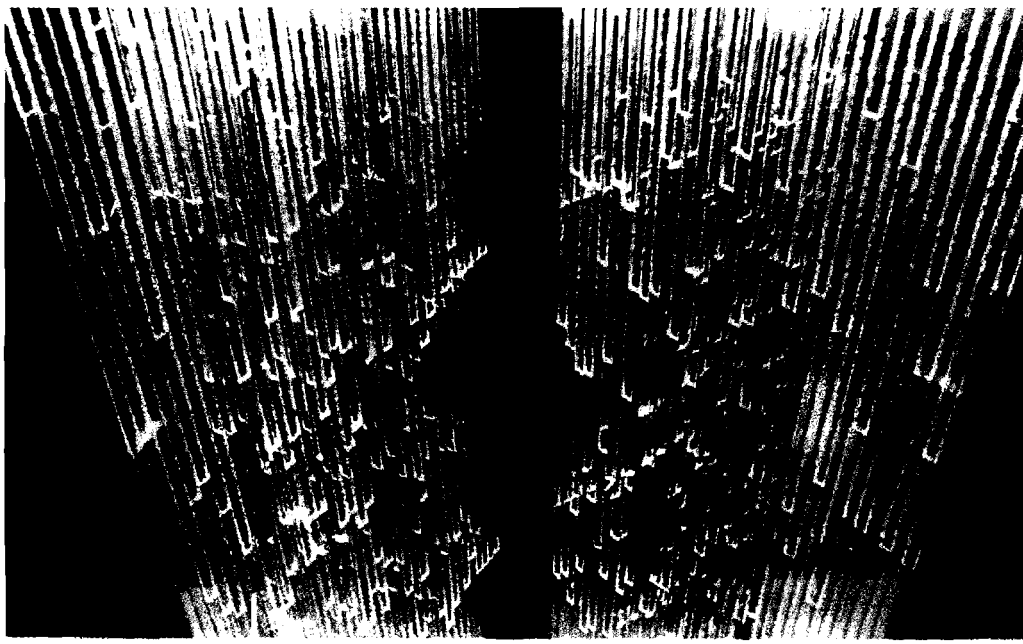
The following appeared in the chapter "Lithuanians on the other side of traditional modernism" by Laima Lauckaite, pages 163-166. Translated from the original Lithuanian by Ramute Plioplys.

Minimalists proclaimed that the essence of art is the reduction of the work into its primary geometric forms, emphasizing its material, but not its spiritual nature. In place of the traditional term "work of art", they suggested a new one - art object. The conceptualists went even further: they denied the material essence of the work of art as a material object, asserting that the essence of art lies in "concepts," or ideas. The work is a stimulus to elicit the viewer's thoughts and feelings, to provoke the viewer to reflect on various things, to understand the traditional ways of thinking, and then break free of them. The artistic form is merely an auxiliary aid in transmitting the desired content. It is therefore no accident that the conceptualists relied first on language and text, utilizing mass communication formats - photographs, maps, diagrams, printed texts, sound and visual recordings. Conceptual art has perhaps had the greatest influence on the Lithuanian-American artist A. Plioplys.

**Audrius Plioplys** (born in 1951 in Toronto) finished his medical studies at the University of Chicago in 1975. However, he also pursued his artistic interests. While living in Washington, D. C., from 1976 to 1979, he devoted himself to independent study of art. His creative work from this period is characterized by objects that are minimalistic and reminiscent of industrial products, whose content is conceptual. In 1979 he moved to Rochester, Minnesota, and then in 1982 he moved to Toronto, Canada. From 1989 he lives in Chicago.

Undoubtedly A. Plioplys has been influenced by the work of the American conceptualist Robert Morris, who created a minimalist cube in 1965, whose sides were covered with mirrored surfaces. In this manner he made the art object equivalent with its reflection, ironically challenging the understanding of modern art and raising many conceptual art problems: the relationship between the real and reflected world (which is more important and what is their hierarchy?), the relationship between the creator and the observer (whose individual "I" is expressed in the work and what is the meaning of that "I" to the contemporary world?). R. Morris's first attempt at a mirrored work was in 1961: he made a mirrored doorway. The very act of going through this door, of passing from one sphere into another acquired a symbolic meaning, which was later especially embraced by various artists. The mirrored frame deepened the meaning of the reflected image even more.

This sort of philosophical play of meanings prompted A. Plioplys to create a folding "Mirrored Doorway" in 1977, comprised of mirrored strips, which expanded on the questions of the reflected reflection. After this he created other mirrored objects with



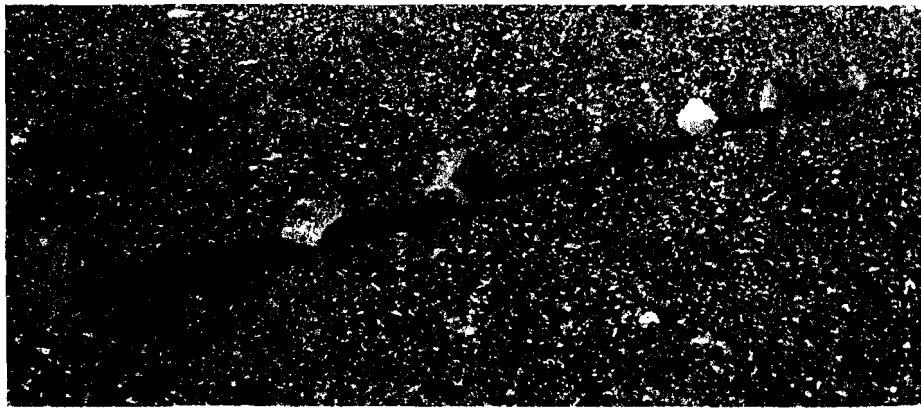
AUDRIUS  
PLIOPLYS  
Mirrored Doorway  
1977

AUDRIUS  
PLIOPLYS  
Stone Time Line  
(detail)  
1980

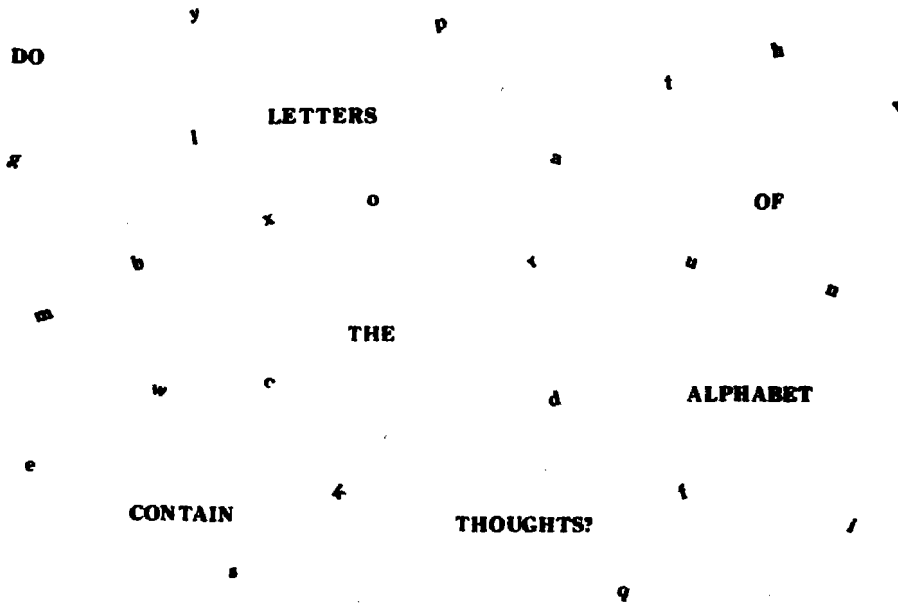


everyone is given the opportunity to make copies of any image or text, however, the quality of that information often deteriorates. A. Plioplys exhibited these works in 1978 in the Washington art gallery Washington Project for the Artists as well as in other galleries.

In the late 1970's the artist created a number of earth art pieces, metaphorically trying to express the idea of displacement. Feeling himself to be a displaced person (that was the term used for war refugees), he reflected on the phenomena of transition and changes in time and space. In 1980, in Canada's arctic Northwest Territory, on Ellesmere Island, during the summer solstice, he recorded the flow of time with a line of stones, whose positions were determined by the shadows cast by the sun from the stones themselves. On Cornwallis Island, he walked a large circle into the rocky surface of the earth, mimicking the sun's circular movement during the solstice. This piece by A. Plioplys once more was related to R.



AUDRIUS  
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Stone Time Line  
(detail) 1980



AUDRIUS  
PLIOPLYS  
Do Letter of the  
Alphabet Contain  
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1987

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solstices, as well as the vernal and autumnal equinoxes. In both instances the eternal astronomical ritual acquires a minimalistic geometric form, whose impressiveness is dictated by ordinary/unadorned nature and its scale. Embodying the concept of displacement in time and space, in a swamp in the Quarry Hill Park, in Rochester, Minnesota, A. Plioplys placed stones in a circle according to archeological excavations of ancient Lithuanian settlement cemeteries. In this manner he "displaced" prehistorical times into the present, as well as a site from Lithuania into America.

For a long time A. Plioplys' medical activities had nothing to do with his artistic endeavors, however, in the late 1980's these disparate interests merged. As a neurologist, researching the neurobiology of the brain, A. Plioplys took on the problems of thinking. The object of his art became thinking and its analysis in various aspects. The artist records the thinking process with encephalograms, graphs/diagrams and other non-artistic methods. However, he most often uses the typical conceptual art form - text. He chooses certain phrases or words associated with thinking and presents them in a way that provokes unexpected meanings: on a painted blue background he prints the words "Blue Thought" (1987); he arranges figures according to geometric forms and then names them appropriately "Triangular Thinking", "Circuitous Thinking", "Circular Thinking" (all 1988). In the phrase of logic "If A equals B, and B equals C, and C equals D and..." etc., which is repeated many times, the concept of equality is eradicated by the different colors of the letters. One should not look for esthetic expression, emotional load, the creator's self-expression, nor hidden symbols. This is typical conceptual art, which concentrates on meaning. Thoughts about thinking, which are evoked by the tension between the two extremes of expression (text and image), the interplay of their meanings, conformity and nonconformity, are the substance of the artist's works.

#### **NOTE BY AUDRIUS V. PLIOPLYS, NOVEMBER 22, 2004:**

In this book's section about my art work, there is an important historical error which I would like to correct. In 1976, after completing my medical internship, I moved to Washington, D. C., to pursue art full-time. My initial plan was to continue concentrating on oil painting, which I did for several months. I then became intrigued with mixed-media sculptures and installations and subsequently devoted all of my energies to this area of expression.

I invented, myself, the use of mirrors, doors and windows: I thought that I was the first person to use these media in the fashion that I had done. It was only after my first individual exhibit at the Washington Project for the Arts, in 1978, during one of my trips to the Soho galleries of New York City, that I became acquainted with the work of Robert Morris. The gallery had a showing of his works—mirrors, doors, windows—and I was truly shocked! He was using the same concepts, ideas, and materials that I had invented. Upon returning to Washington, I went to the public library and dug out as much information about Morris as I could. I was even more shocked to see that some of his works pre-dated my own! Nevertheless, Morris had no influence on my work at all. (Nor I on him.)

Further, in the section about my own earth art works, I would like to clarify that I indeed did take inspiration from other artists. However, the primary inspiration was Robert Smithson, not Robert Morris. Nevertheless, I highly admire the work of Morris, and even recorded my own electroencephalogram while thinking of his works!