



The Balzekas Museum, 6500 S. Pulaski Road in Chicago, is hosting an exhibit of the artwork of Audrius V. Plioplys of Beverly called "Neurotheology: From Christ to Cajal" now through May 7.

North Beverly doctor shows art at museum

by Pat Somers Cronin

It's different; in fact, it's unique!

"Neurotheology: From Christ to Cajal" at the Balzekas Museum celebrates not only the 2,000th anniversary of the birth of Christ, but the 100th anniversary of Santiago Ramon y Cajal's publications on the complexity of the human cerebral cortex.

Fortunately for the average laymen viewing this exhibit of artworks, there is the guiding hand of the artist himself, also a doctor: Audrius V. Plioplys, a North Beverly resident who prefers to be called Andy. It was his fascination with the three landmark articles of Cajal, a Spanish neuroanatomist and 1906 Nobel Prize winner, that led to the creation of this particular exhibit.

There are 21 large format (48 by 60 inches) color digital images on canvas. And just as there are six layers of the human cerebral cortex, there are six surface planes in the exhibit as well as six colors employed: three primary—

yellow, red, blue—and three secondary—orange, green, purple.

Set against stark white brick walls, the bold, bright canvases have an almost magnetic effect. They were the subject of considerable study and conversation as a gala throng of viewers gathered on a night of April snow, a tribute to the artist as well as the indomitable spirit of the Lithuanian community. They are on view through Sunday, May 7.

As Andy, the doctor, studied Cajal's description of brain cells—and the spidery drawings of the cells of the nervous system Cajal developed through a special staining technique—Andy, the artist, responded with his own questions about the development of memory and personal recollection. Thus his conclusion: from neuronal complexity arise emergent thoughts, words and theology.

From there, it was a logical step to the creation of this very personal but dynamic

exhibit in which Cajal's drawings are subtracted from the background color, revealing deeper layers of underlying memory, underlying artworks.

The subjects—the underlying artworks—are many and varied. "Thoughts of an artistic career: first habitation, Washington, D.C." reveals that Andy, having chosen medicine and having completed his studies, seriously considered—for three years—the role of artist instead. "Contemplative Thoughts: University of Chicago" is set against Bond Chapel, while "Thoughts of Demons: University of Chicago" combines red and blue backgrounds and distinctly captures a fearsome gargoyle!

The Rocky Mountains in Colorado serve as background for "Thoughts of displaced religious sanctity," recalling an old Ukranian Orthodox church on an isolated mountain peak. "Call for the Divine: from the pinnacle of the temple" utilizes Andy's photograph of the Washington, D.C., Mormon Temple, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. Another treasured photo, exhibited 20 years ago, evokes a distant memory: "Thoughts of prayers: Site of Williamson Mission, Granite Falls, Minnesota."

"Thoughts of a city before the Flood: Beaver, Minnesota," naturally in brilliant blue, eerily creates river and trees; while "Theological thoughts" in purple, with touches of green, orange and blue, comes home to Chicago's Theological Seminary. Much further afield, "Thoughts of Pagan Temples" takes the viewer to Pompeii, Italy, while "Thoughts of Henry the Navigator were combined with prayers" is set in Sagres, Portugal. A riveting orange canvas, so right for Mexico City reflection, is entitled "Thoughts of a head-long descent."

The exhibit is sponsored by ECPC, the Illinois Arts Council and CityArts Grants. The Balzekas Museum is located at 6500 S. Pulaski Road in Chicago. For more information, call (773) 582-6500.