By the time he finished med school at the University of Chicago in June, 1975, art had become the primary interest in his life.

Turning to art had nothing to do with Plioplys' medical skills. A better-than-average student, he'd received five fellowships for advanced study in his chosen specialty, was a teaching assistant and had published an article in the Journal of Applied Physiology, all before completing his internship.

"But there was nothing creative about doing a general medical internship," Plioplys says. "I started painting on weekends or whenever I wasn't on duty."

Once having made the decision, Plioplys came to Washington where he and Geri Critchley, an employee of a student travel organization, were married and where he pursued art full-time, living on savings he'd accumulated during his internship.

For someone with no art training, Plioplys' work, tending toward three-dimensional structures, utilizing recycled materials and square shapes, cracked mirrors and other "conceptual" ideas, has met with favorable critical response.

"The visual aspects are one thing, but the important aspects are the ideas, the ideas that for men tend to go along philosophic and psychological lines. The mirrors, for example, are objects of revelation, reflection and insight. Vague it may be difficult for laymen to understand."

But selling enough pieces to make a living is a different story.

"My art hasn't been commercial, the market just isn't there," Plioplys says, noting that just handful of Washington artists are able to pursue their professions full-time. Most teach, but he didn't want to.

THAT HARD REALITY led to Plioplys' decision in May to return to medicine, a move his wife thought would be difficult to execute. "Medicine is a very conservative profession."

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For years, people have disdained the work — or even made fun of it — often jokes a lot more than a lot more. But unlike the work, the stories of those people who took that risk.

"The type of art I want to do will be easier now, that my financial status will be easier," Plioplys says.

"Along with the easing of financial burdens has come an easing of emotional ones."

"I feel better about myself now, he says. "Art plays a very important role in society, but there has to be a balance between personal creativity and the needs of society at large.""