After a brilliant showing at the University of Chicago Medical School, Audrius "Andy" Plioplys was finishing his internship in Madison, Wis., in June, 1976 and was on the threshold of specializing in neurology, when the artist inside his doctor's white coat finally pushed its way forward.

"During my internship I often went running," Plioplys says. "One sunny day near the end of that year, I stopped and looked at the sky and the clouds. I said to myself, 'What did I do here other than be a smart aleck, when what I really wanted to do was express myself in a personal matter'?

In that moment, Plioplys says now, he decided to quit a promising medical career and do what his heart told him: artwork.

"My interest in art had been growing for quite a while," says Plioplys, 26, who maintains a studio in his apartment in Washington, D.C.

"I started painting in medical school during my spare time."

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 rectangular 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, ideas that for men tend to go along philosophic and psychological lines. The mirrors, for example, are objects of revelation, reflection and insight, ideas that 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 a 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," Critchley says. "Andy was warned two years ago by doctors that if he voluntarily stepped out, it would be hard to get back in."

But luck was with Plioplys once he made the decision. He was accepted at the famed Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minn., as a resident for the summer of 1979, where he hopes to resume research in pediatric neurology.

Actually, Plioplys' interests in art and medicine both tend toward the theoretical. He'll continue doing "installation pieces," works of art that are so big they have to be permanently installed.

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

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," needs Plioplys feels he'll be helping meet by going into medical research.

Artistry is now back inside a white coat—but is now assured of its place in the sun.

(From "The Washington Star," June 27, 1978.)
A. Plioplys Apreiškimų knyga
(tapyta kanva, masonitas, veidrodžiai)
Book of Revelations, 4"x4"x12". Painted canvas, masonite, mirrors.
—Photo Peter Burnett

Furthermore, A. Plioplys has been actively engaged in research on the influence of Lithuanian and Baltic, leading artists on Western and Russian art since the beginning of this century. His findings have been published in Lithuanian and English periodicals and were also given in lectures to American artists.

Audrius Plioplys savo meninį stilių ir menines mintis yra gerokai apvalgęs; tą pastebėjo parodyų recenzentai; jo meninį subrendimą lūždija straipsniai meno klausimais.

B. D.