

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

ART REVIEW

A man of his words: Audrius Plioplys employs language to get message across

By Alan G. Artner

Tribune art critic

Audrius Plioplys is a neurologist and neuroscientist who also happens to be a shrewd artist. As is shown by his 25-year retrospective at the Balzekas Museum of Lithuanian Culture, he has been involved with some of the strongest contemporary currents — abstract painting, conceptual art, temporary installations, photography — drawing upon the content of one profession to fuel the other.

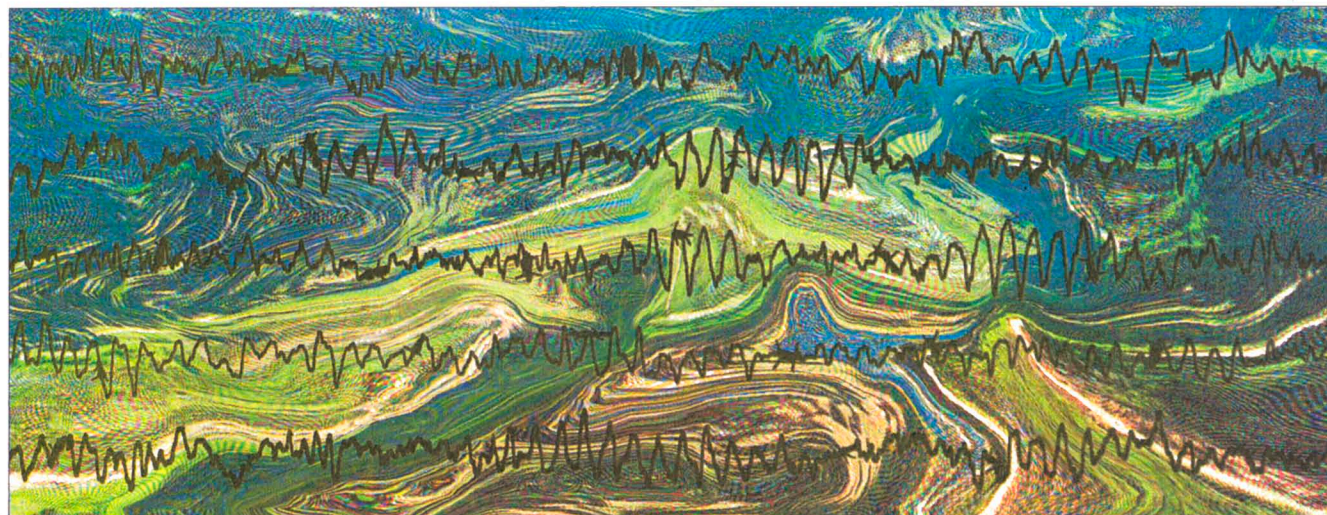
Plioplys has described his art as “an ongoing metaphorical investigation of consciousness, thinking and the thought process,” which is so vast and abstruse an area of inquiry that one immediately is overawed, prevented from considering what’s more important, the quality of what the artist has made of his content visually.

In essence, Plioplys has been a word artist, that is, a conceptualist who early on deployed words in the manner of concrete poetry and later appended them to explain each element of mural-like pieces that without extended labels would prove mainly decorative and ideationally impossible to decipher.

Along the way, Plioplys also used electroencephalograms (his own, made while thinking of artists, specific works or issues), drawings by the Spanish neuroanatomist Santiago Ramon y Cajal (which Plioplys altered and superimposed on his work) and linear structures derived from particular pieces of classical music (presumably employed in homage to the early modern Lithuanian painter-composer Mikalojus Ciurlionis).

Over the decades, Plioplys’ pieces have gotten larger and the colors louder, but this more aggressive visual quality has required the addition of words to draw attention to the “meaning” behind the layering of images that became for the artist a primary way of working. At other times, as in a group of straight photographs in black and white and color, he has seemed so concerned with the assigning of specific personal meaning that the images are sandwiched between words that graphically crowd and, ultimately, oppress them.

This reliance on text to convey what images cannot make clear is, of course, characteristic



Audrius Plioplys used his own electroencephalogram as part of “Thoughts of Valley Peacefulness,” 1996, digital print on canvas.

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Plioplys’ works — including “I Think Therefore Acrylic,” 1988 (above) — are on display at the Balzekas Museum of Lithuanian Culture.

of much contemporary art. But with Plioplys, it takes on a grating high-flown quality both because of the language — one piece reads “con-

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sciousness is a biologic phenomena emerging from the lateral intersections of cerebral cortical neurons” — as well as the extravagance of assertion, for the artist actually has created a piece that compares his output to the explorations of Christopher Columbus.

Plioplys works in extended series, and the exhibition presents a generous selection from several, though visitors also are alerted to an up-

coming show, another retrospective, at the artist’s alma mater, the University of Chicago, plus pieces hanging at a Michigan Avenue clothing store. They can be recommended to anyone in search of an art that overbears as much as it enlightens.

aartner@tribune.com

“Thinking and the Thought Process: A 25 Year Retrospective Art Exhibit” will continue at the Balzekas Museum of Lithuanian Culture, 6500 S. Pulaski Rd., through Oct. 28. 773-582-6500. A complementary exhibition will be held at Rockefeller Memorial Chapel, 5850 S. Woodlawn Ave., from Monday through Oct. 28. 773-702-2100.