

AUDRIUS PLIOPLYS

“From the complexity of neurons, words, thoughts, and consciousness emerge. From this self-awareness, we illuminate ourselves—and others.”

Good evening, everyone. That quotation is from the artist and neurologist Audrius Plioplys whose work surrounds you as I speak. I’m Shadi Bartsch Zimmer, the Director of the Institute on the Formation of Knowledge, and I’m delighted to welcome you to our very first art installation and exhibit, “Pillars of Thought.”

There are many reasons we asked Dr. Plioplys to do us the great favor of showcasing his work in this Institute. To start with, like the Institute, he brings together practices usually kept apart. As a neurologist, he has studied neurological conditions from autism to Alzheimer’s. As an artist who has had over 50 individual art exhibits, he has borrowed the neuron itself for metaphorical reflections on thinking and consciousness. Here is an intriguing juxtaposition.

Neurons receive, process, and transmit information through electrical and chemical signals. They are central to perception, personality, and memory, and as such they form a building block of the human. And just as our memories transform visual impulses into vast neuronal web works, Dr Plioplys transform images of neurons in the brain back into exotic visual forms to stimulate us and engage with us..

Is this art abstract or is it personal? Or does it do away with such distinctions altogether, part of where its brilliance lies? Here’s a hint. While working in the EEG laboratory at the Mayo Clinic in 2000, Plioplys decided to see how his own brain operated. He had a technician take his EEG while he pondered “artistic topics,” like Vermeer and Lithuanian artist [Čiurlionis](#). His resultant 2005 collection of digital prints, *Symphonic Thoughts*, showed his brain waves as a central element in each piece. Similarly, the light sculptures you see around you are named after writers and artists who have shaped Plioplys’s life and work. So you are literally looking at the impact of the acquisition on knowledge on Dr Plioplys’s neurons, an illumination, as it were, of this thought. And also, of his memories—

memories of these artists and his own life, memories which change every time they are accessed, whether in the brain or on Plioplys' pillars.

For Dr. Plioplys, who is Lithuanian, the commemoration of memory in visual form is personal. His great-grandfather, both grandfathers, and one aunt died as a consequence of interrogations by the secret police. His grandmother was deported to Siberia at age 71. Seven other aunts and uncles were also deported to Siberia. Much of his art stands as a reminder that we need to remember these people, whose images are also often layered into Plioplys' work along with neurons, light, and language.

While scientific, then, these images are not antiseptic. The brain interacts with memory and perception, and what emerges is art. The formation of personhood and the absorption of information become striking images that merge the scientific, the personal, and the cultural. That is an unusual trio. This is another reason why we at the Institute fell in love with the art of Audrius Plioplys. We too know that the formation of knowledge is anything but antiseptic, but emerges at the intersection of science, culture, and the person—a multiplicity of interactive layers that make up the human and what she knows.

And now please welcome Audrius Plioplys.