



WDCB, The Arts Section

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On this edition of The Arts Section, host Gary Zidek talks to the program director behind one of Chicago's longest running literary traditions. The 35th annual Printers Row Lit Fest takes place Saturday June 8 & Sunday June 9.

Later in the program, Gary talks to a Chicago man who has spent the past 40 years working on his two passions, neurology and art.

The Dueling Critics, Kerry Reid and Jonathan Abarbanel. will stop by to talk about a new musical, SIX, that's winning over audiences with its mix of history and pop music. Gary reviews a new documentary about the late U.S. fashion designer Halston.

The seven-minute interview with Audrius Plioplys starts at 51:00:

Podcast link: <https://theartssection.org/episodes/2019/6/2/the-arts-section-060219printers-row-lit-fest-halston-doc-review>

Gary Zidek: Tune to 90.9 and and 90.7 FM. This is The Arts Section. I'm Gary Zidek. And a quick reminder, make sure to visit The Arts Section website at theartssection.org. You can find all my past movie reviews, the dueling critic theater reviews, and all the stories you hear on the program.

Gary Zidek: Many of the people who visit the Stevanovich Institute on the Formation of Knowledge have curious minds. So, the art installation in the cycles of memory would seem to be a perfect fit. The three-part exhibit explores the changing nature of human memory. The works are the result of one man's lifelong pursuit of his two passions, neurology and art.

Gary Zidek: This is Doctor Audrius Plioplys. The retired neurologist is the artist behind the cycles of memory exhibit. I recently caught up with Plioplys at the Stevanovich Institute to talk about his latest installation. We also discussed how the human brain compartmentalizes different ways of thinking.

Audrius P.: Dealing with the specific patient issues, medical things, you're drawing on memories that relate to medicine and how to diagnose and treat so those networks are separate from networks in the brain where you're thinking about aesthetics and design and balance and composition.

Audrius P.: So, using different parts and networks within the brain, but they're distributed around, so you wouldn't be able to pick out one particular spot as being the medicine one or another spot being the art. They're sort of distributed throughout.

Gary Zidek: Plioplys was a practicing neurologist for more than 40 years, but his career in medicine almost never happened because of his love of art.

Gary Zidek: You went to medical school, but then quit your career in medicine and decided to pursue the arts full time.

Audrius P.: That's right. That's what happened. A seed for art was planted in my soul by a childhood friend of mine in Toronto. He was a tremendous mischief maker and one summer to keep him off the streets, his parents put him into an art program. And so, I'd come over to visit him and see him start with a blank canvas and then slowly lines would show up and then colors. And before you know it, you have this beautiful painting. So, you have this beautiful work of art out of nothing! So that just captivated me and that was where the kind of seed started.

Audrius P.: It only started growing when I was in medical school, here on campus at the University of Chicago. And it grew so much that I started spending more and more time in the art museums, at art galleries, that I thought I made an error. I thought I shouldn't have gone into medicine, neurology at all. I should've gone into art. I decided I have to quit medicine and just do art. And I had to take it from there. So that's what I did. I finished my internship and then I did leave entirely. I moved out to the east coast, had art exhibits, art reviews, sales were taking place, things were going very nicely, from the start.

Audrius P.: But then I started to feel very guilty because I had amassed all this knowledge of neurology and I wasn't doing anything with it. I wasn't helping anybody. There's a parable that Jesus says you don't take a lit candle and put it under a bushel basket, which is basically what I was doing. And I sort of started to feel very guilty about it.

Audrius P.: And then I realized that I was making a big error. Medicine, neurology, neuroscience, and art do not need to be separate worlds. It's not choose one or the other. I'm a smart guy. I should be able to figure out how to put the stuff together, make a unity out of it. And so that's what I've been

doing for 30 years, struggling using different media, different techniques to investigate the mind, thinking, consciousness in the world of art like you would in a neurobiology research laboratory.

Gary Zidek: Once you decided to go back into medicine and become a practicing neurologist, then is it a matter of carving out time for your art? How did you make it work?

Audrius P.: Well I will always continue doing art. Never stopped. During residency training particularly, it was difficult. The hours were very, very long, but I still did that. I found time. I take vacations just to do art, go away from the family, everything, just work full time. So, it was a challenge to do that. I continuously had art exhibits, participated in group shows, had gallery representations. So that went on continuously for the past 30 years.

Gary Zidek: Plioplys's approach as an artist has evolved over that time. What began as an interest in painting, shifted to a more multimedia practice.

Audrius P.: Initially, it was painting, all the things that I did. We're talking about 40 plus years ago. And then I went into art full time. On the east coast, it was conceptual art, doing installing pieces. The works included sound systems, light systems, doorways, mirrors, windows, and rather complex installation pieces.

Gary Zidek: Plioplys's Pillars of Thought installation incorporates LED light systems, layers of images on freestanding columns. It's the first part of the cycles of memory series currently on display at the Stevanovich Institute. Plioplys says he was invited to create an exhibit for the University of Chicago entity that's dedicated to the study of knowledge.

Audrius P.: Well it would have to fit in within the rubric of formation of knowledge, but my artwork, all of it fits into that general theme so that's not a problem. It was a matter then of how do I deal with this space? It's a beautiful architectural space. It's just magnificent and how to make it work for an art installation. So that was the challenge.

Gary Zidek: While Cycles of Memory doesn't have a formal narrative, Plioplys hopes the works intrigue people.

Audrius P.: Visual art isn't a story that I want to tell. It's an experience, especially an installation which is complex like this. It's an experience. It's very different, day and night here because in the darkness, these columns stand out. In the daytime, you don't see them as well. You see the whirling pieces much more, so the experience is different depending on the lighting. So that if people find something of interest to them, that's wonderful.

Audrius P.: Now I've been here at the Institute many times working on these pieces, changing things, modifying, removing, replacing things and you just sort of you know ... half of a day. And every time I've been here, there have been just two or three people just walk in off the street through the door asking, what is this? What's going on, about the artwork, not the Institute, but the artwork. People are attracted to come in. They say basically I've been walking up and down and fascinated, what is this?

Gary Zidek: That's Dr. Audrius Plioplys, the artist behind the exhibit Cycles of Memory that's currently on display at the University of Chicago's Stevanovich Institute through June 21st. Certain elements of the exhibit are going to reside at the Institute permanently. You can find more information about Dr. Plioplys's work at his website, www.plioplys.com.