

City watch

Matters of mind make great subject for artist doctor

Dr. Audrius Plioplys may be a neurologist by profession, but he's an artist by avocation

By Jon Anderson
Tribune staff reporter

In Beverly, in a castlelike home in a wooded glen, Dr. Audrius Plioplys retreats to his second-floor studio to ponder some of mankind's oldest questions. What is thinking? What is memory?

And what do they look like?

Plioplys (pronounced pleap-olis) is a neurologist who trained at the University of Chicago and the Mayo Clinic. He is also a serious artist who took three years out of medicine, after his internship, to follow his artistic dreams.

"For me, art is a passion which started a long time ago," he says. "It's not a pastime. I don't relax at it."

Yes, he has hobbies, which include gardening, restoring vintage cars, racing Porsches, coin collecting, gathering up Civil War mementos and searching for 200 million-year-old fossils in rural Illinois.

But for Plioplys, who is a very bright fellow indeed, the big challenge in his life is figuring out how to get past what some have called "Descartes' Error," the ancient theory that the mind and the body are separate worlds.

"Wrong—they are together," he said Tuesday night, leading a visitor past startling works, hanging on walls throughout the house. In a sense, he modeled for some of them, using his own brain waves, recorded while he thought about art in general and, later, about Vermeer, Michelangelo and Rembrandt.

At first glance, some of the compositions, depicting memory, looked like gloppy spider webs. Others, reflecting thoughts, had rows of squiggly lines, with spikes when ideas of interest were perceived.

"I hope they raise questions in people," he said, noting that one purpose of his current works is to encourage viewers



Tribune photo by Charles Cherney

For Dr. Audrius Plioplys, the body and mind are together, and that's the basis for his artwork, which depicts memory.

to "think about the workings of your own head." They are, in a sense, a starting point for exploring inner space.

On Friday, an exhibition of 22 of his works, under the group title "Neurotheology," will open to the public with a reception at the International Museum of Surgical Sciences, 1524 N. Lake Shore Drive.

There will be another show

this summer, at Flatfile Photography Gallery.

"Is there life after death?" the visitor asked Tuesday. "It would be nice, wouldn't it," Plioplys replied, adding that many of life's mysteries remain to be explained—or even portrayed in an artistic way.

Critics, however, have liked what they have seen so far.

After one show, in Prince-

ton, N.J., art reviewer Nicole Plett paid tribute to the way that Plioplys "gracefully encapsulated" a lot of data. A Minneapolis curator reported that "his work caused a fire in my mind."

Born in Toronto to Lithuanian parents, Plioplys came to Chicago as a teenager. He was the valedictorian at St. Rita High School in 1968. Now, 51, he is working as a child neurologist and a research neuroscientist, trying to find causes and cures for learning disorders and autism in children and Alzheimer's disease in the elderly.

"I now spend about two days a week on my art," he said, though he is careful to maintain a balance between the demands of his art, his science and his home life with his wife, Sigita, and two daughters, ages 10 and 17.

"We both are very much in the world and it is often very stressful," noted his wife, a psychiatrist at Children's Memorial Hospital. "But we always have dinner together—a cooked dinner—as a family."