

# Neighborhood doctor merges art, science

by **Laina D. Krisik**

The Mona Lisa represents artistic expression and the "Telltale Heart" descriptive literature. Now consider neurobiology (the study of the nervous system) as an art form.

Mercy Hospital child neurologist Dr. Audrius Plioplys, a Beverly resident, has spent many years bridging the gap between science and art through the visual depiction of brain waves.

"Many years ago I thought the two things, art and medicine, were incompatible, two totally different worlds," said Plioplys.

But he has brought the two together as an artist.

The concept of integrating the two emerged in 1980 while completing his residency in neurology at the Mayo Clinic in Minnesota. At the EEG

lab, Plioplys asked one of the technicians to record his brain waves as he thought artistic thoughts and contemplated the works of other artists.

"I had a list of things I wanted to think about. I asked the technician to mark number one, number two etc., on the paper as the tracing was going to identify what I was thinking at what point. This went on for one hour," said Plioplys.

The result became creative art titled, "Thinking about Rembrandt," "Thinking about Ciurlionis" and "Thinking about Robert Morris's Mirrors." They were exhibited at the Contemporary Arts Center in Vilnius, Lithuania, in 1995.

The process of visually depicting the thought process  
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# Plioplys

(Continued from page 1) has led Plioplys to an ongoing investigation on how thought and consciousness arise from the nervous system.

"Instead of using the research laboratory, I'm using an artistic medium. Over time my research lab slowed down and phased out, and the artwork became more prominent. This is my research lab for neurobiology and the art form," Plioplys said about the integration of art and science.

The significance of the year 2000 in his latest exhibit at the Balzekas Museum of Lithuanian Culture titled, "Neurotheology: From Christ to Cajal," acknowledged the 2,000th anniversary of the birth of Christ and the 100th anniversary of the neuronal drawings by Spanish neuroanatomist, Santiago Ramon y Cajal. Using three primary colors—yellow, red and blue—and three secondary colors—green, orange and purple—the exhibit was arranged as six colored layers. These layers represented the six layers of the cerebral cortex.

"I'm trying to bridge the

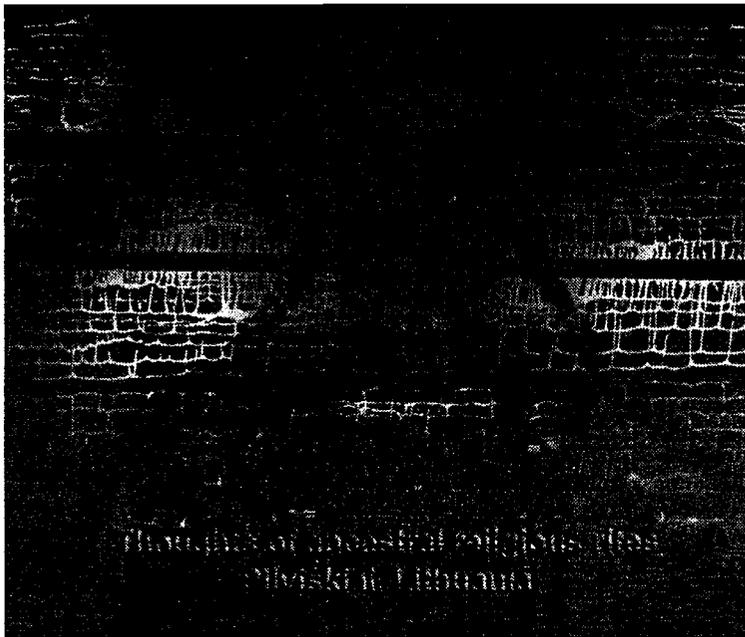
gap between clinical work [neurobiology research] and art. What's behind the artwork is more important than the visual presence. When you're dealing with your own life and thought process, usually you don't know where ideas or memories come from. You have your own personality. Everything is autopilot—words emerge, and ideas pop into your head. I'm trying to correlate this with the actual way the nervous system works," said Plioplys.

Behind each picture of brain cells lays a real photograph of different places Plioplys has visited such as Mexico City and Lithuania.

"The words in the title are associated with and are emerging through. Each image has an underlying photograph as a distant memory underlying what's emerging through to the current visual presence. I consider the artwork rather philosophical. I'm trying to create a visual picture. Although attractive for visual interest, the idea behind it is what's important," said Plioplys.



**Audrius Plioplys**



**Beverly resident Dr. Audrius Plioplys attempts to incorporate all aspects of his professional career in his works of art, such as this brain scan.**

"It was extremely popular," said Stanley Balzeka, president of the Balzekas Museum. "The artwork was interesting, yet educational, approaching a subject matter that many of us don't realize is really there. It has opened a new dimension—profession and workplace into the art field by showing the relation between art and the common

workplace."

Recollection of Plioplys' earliest influence to art can be traced back to a childhood friend in the fifth grade who was taking oil painting and art classes. Other artistic talent in his family is found in the glasswork of his second aunt who, at one point, was the foremost glass artist in Lithuania.

The dedication and recent progress made in his clinical work as a child neurologist center on practical approaches targeting common problem areas in this population such as pulmonary infections.

"We're the first people to use the 'vest' device that has air pockets connected to hoses to a machine that oscillates air. It is a super form of chest therapy that has cut cases of pneumonia in half," said Plioplys.

The device pumps the chest at high frequency and helps clean the lungs out. The focus of Plioplys' latest research is on providing a better quality of life for the children.

Born in 1951 in Toronto of Lithuanian parents, Plioplys resides with his family in Beverly. In addition to his work as a neurologist and creations as an artist, Plioplys' hobbies include collecting and racing his Porsche.

The assortment of artifacts found in his home is as varied as his artwork. Collections of fossils, wrapping and hairs of an Egyptian mummy, an old scalpel set and Lithuanian coins reflect his interests.

Currently, Plioplys is sending out proposals for future exhibits.