

# BOLD JOURNEY



## Meet Audrius Plioplys

February 27, 2024

We were lucky to catch up with Audrius Plioplys recently and have shared our conversation below.

**Audrius, thank you so much for joining us and offering your lessons and wisdom for our readers. One of the things we most admire about you is your generosity and so we'd love if you could talk to us about where you think your generosity comes from.**

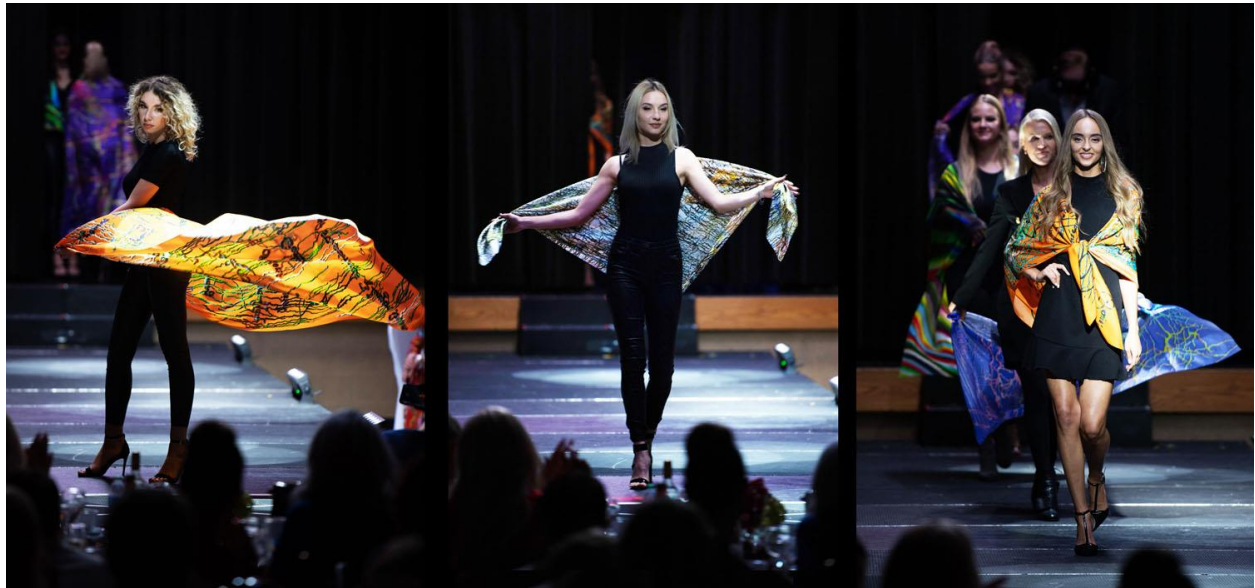
This is really an interesting question, because I do not know the answer. But it is worth a brief discussion.

I want to help people. Through medicine and neurology I have been able to do that in a hands-on fashion.

I am inquisitive and creative, and have done much clinical research in neurology. Some of my accomplishments, such as devices that prevent pneumonia in children with

severe cerebral palsy, are now in use across North America. So, my assistance has grown past my own two hands.

In art, I also try to benefit people by stimulating them to think of how it is that they are human, how it is that they have compassion for others. I have put much effort into educating the youth about neurobiology and art. Actually, just a month ago, I received the Model Icon award entitled “Educator of the Year”, quite an honor for me.



**Appreciate the insights and wisdom. Before we dig deeper and ask you about the skills that matter and more, maybe you can tell our readers about yourself?**

For over 30 years I have been both a professional artist and a neurologist-neuroscientist. I have been artistically exploring the origins of thinking, thought, and consciousness. Where does awareness come from? How is it that we are cognizant of ourselves and of those near us? What is it that makes us human?

I went to college at the University of Chicago as a physics major. I wanted to understand the fundamental structure of nature. While in college I became fascinated by neurobiology—how is it that a collection of 100 billion cells gives rise to a cognizant human being? My career shifted into neurology-neurobiology. A further shift took place with the incorporation of art into my neuroscientific explorations.

Artistic approaches have included large scale paintings, prints on paper, site-specific installations, and light sculptures with LED light systems. The underlying images are of my own previous art works. I transform them into exotic forms, just as our memories transform visual impulses into vast neuronal web-works. Multiple layers are assembled, modified and blended. Cerebral cortical neuronal drawings, superimposed and subtracted from the surrounding color, reveal deeper layers of thoughts and memories.

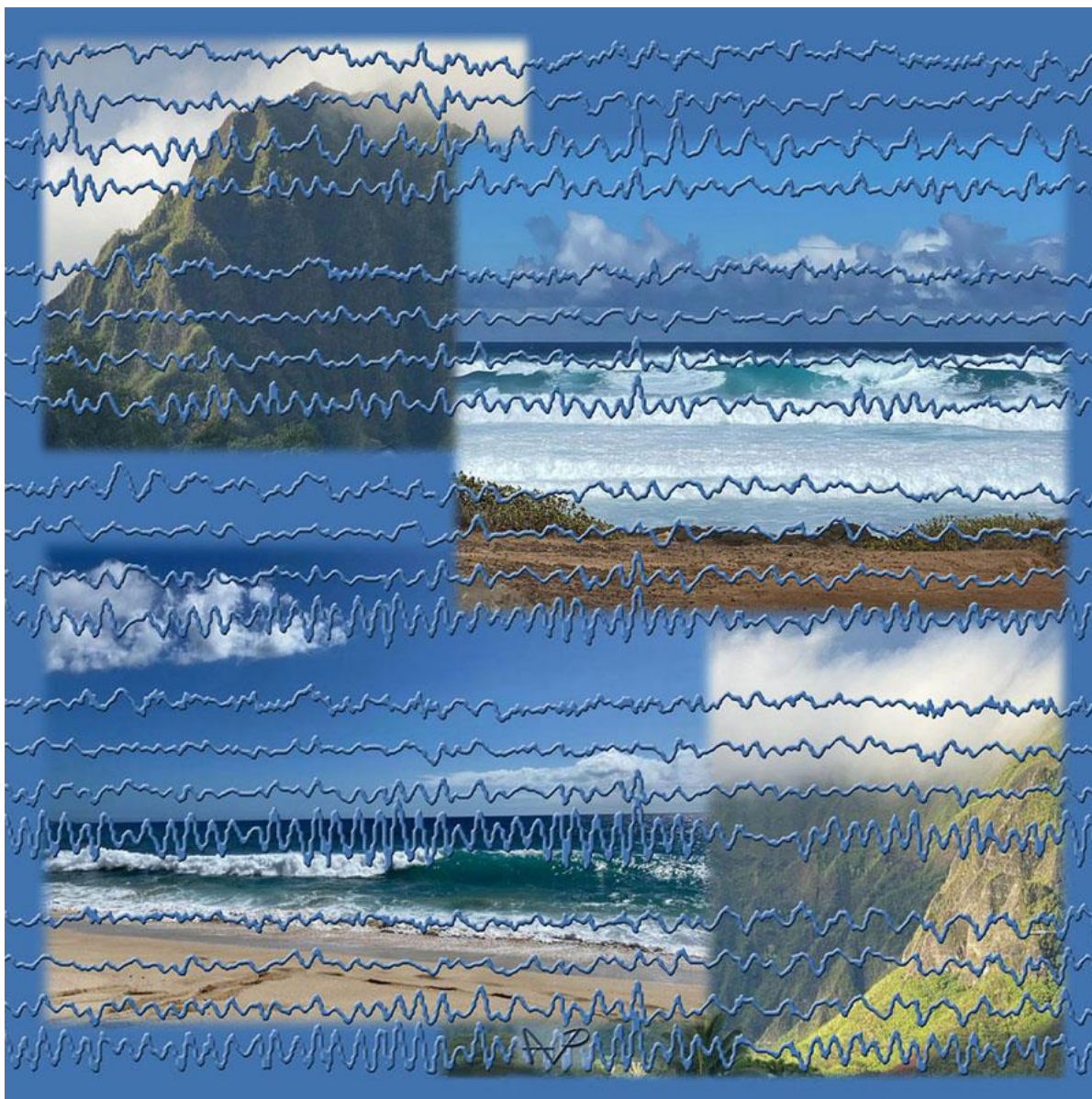


My own MRI brain scans and electroencephalograms (brain waves) are interweaved. From neuronal complexity words, thoughts, and consciousness emerge.



My most recent explorations are large-scale, 100% pure silk scarves, 140 x 140 cm (55 x 55 in). The mulberry silk used is of the highest quality and printing techniques are state of the art. These scarves are heavy, durable, and warm. These silk works of art, just as all my previous pieces, have multiple overlapping, interweaving layers of content, meaning and visual elements. Complexity of their design matches the complexity of our own thought processes. But with these, I am taking art off gallery and museum walls and making it available for the general public to use and enjoy.





Artistically, I am fully self-taught. The seed of art was planted by a childhood friend in Toronto. During medical school at the University of Chicago, I started painting, and the passion for art grew uncontrollably. After internship, I left medicine entirely, to create art full-time. Three years later, after many exhibits and positive critical reviews, I started to feel guilty that I was not helping others with my knowledge of neurology. I realized that I must return to medicine, and at the same time, merge my art with neuro-scientific investigations.

I have had over 50 individual art exhibits and participated in over 100 group shows. In Chicago, my art is on permanent display at the Blue Man Group, Illinois Institute of Technology, University of Chicago, Blackstone Hotel, Rockefeller Memorial Chapel, Brookfield Zoo, and Beverly Arts Center. In Minneapolis, eight pieces, including large



scale ones, are on permanent display at the American Academy of Neurology, which opened recently. My paintings are in many museum collections internationally including the Art Institute and the Museum of Contemporary Art, both in Chicago. A suite of my art books are displayed in a modern art museum near Marseilles, France. My installation piece, Mirror Neurons, graces the cover of the Oxford University Press book, *Consciousness and the Social Brain*. Most recently, the University of Chicago requested that I donate four of my light columns for permanent display. In thanks the University honored me by naming the three-story entrance way of the Stevanovich Institute on the Formation of Knowledge, where these pieces are displayed, after me.



In recognition of my work organizing the year-long Hope and Spirit program, a commemoration of the 20 million victims of Stalin's atrocities, I was designated Man of the Year for 2012 by the Balzekas Museum of Lithuanian Culture in Chicago. The previous year's recipient was the US senator from Illinois, Mr. Richard Durbin.

My neurologic investigations concentrated on cognitive disorders, from autism in children, to Alzheimer's disease in the elderly. I have published 79 neurology articles and received \$2.8 million in research grants. For twenty years, I worked to improve the care provided to severely disabled cerebral palsied children and reported the world's best survival rates. I pioneered the use of vest-therapy to prevent pneumonias in children with cerebral palsy, a technique that is now in use in all pediatric medical centers across North America. I retired from neurology twelve years ago, and am, again, engaged in art full-time.



**If you had to pick three qualities that are most important to develop, which three would you say matter most?**

1. Perseverance. If you are trying to get your art out into the public, particularly if you are looking for avenues for sales, the challenges are massive. Have faith in yourself and do not give up.
2. Balance. Make sure that you balance your artistic activities, your money making profession, and your social life, so that none of them suffer. It may take a lot of determination and effort, but this can be done.
3. Make sure to be born into a good family. Accomplishment and wealth are often inherited. In my case, my genetics was very good. My parents only had high school education, but they both quite smart people. As far as wealth goes, I grew up in poverty. In my case this made me resourceful and able to figure out how to make do with very



little—how to be creative. If I wanted a toy to play with, I had to build it myself—my first steps in becoming an artist.

### **How can folks who want to work with you connect?**

In approaching the origin of our thinking, our consciousness, many areas of artistic expression are appropriate. For example, moving my art off gallery walls and putting it on silk scarves that can be worn, has expanded my art into movement, into dance. Collaborations with musicians and choreographers have taken place and I would like to do more of this.

Since so many different activities emerge from our central nervous system, I would be interested in collaborating with almost anyone.



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Youtube: Audrius Plioplys

Image Credit: In the first photograph, the person with me is Dr. Jurgita Ušinskienė, Chair, Department of Radiology, National Cancer Institute, Vilnius, Lithuania. She ordered the bespoke scarf and worked with me to create it. She is a co-author of this artwork.

