



**“Siberia Souls,” by Audrius Plioplys, features light sculptures as well as framed prints. “Siberia Souls” grew out of a project that Plioplys organized at the Balzekas Museum of Lithuanian Culture. His work evokes memories of those who disappeared into Josef Stalin’s deportation camps in the 1940s. It will be part of the Beverly Art Walk. (photo by C. Flynn)**

## Exhibit remembers Stalin’s victims

by Carol Flynn

Faces stare out from constantly changing colored lights, phantom memories of those who disappeared into Josef Stalin’s deportation camps in the 1940s.

Artist and neuroscientist Audrius (Andy) Plioplys wants to make sure people never forget these people and that we see to it that history does not

repeat itself.

This is the theme of “Siberia Souls,” the art exhibit by Plioplys that opened on Sept. 16 at the Beverly Unitarian Church, 10244 S. Longwood Dr., and will run through Oct. 9. The hours for the exhibit are Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., and Sundays from noon to 2 p.m.

On Oct. 1, as part of the

Beverly Art Walk, the exhibit will be open from noon to 7 p.m. The exhibit is free to the public.

“Siberia Souls” grew out of a project that Plioplys organized at the Balzekas Museum of Lithuanian Culture, 6500 S. Pulaski Road, in 2011-2012. The project, “Hope and Spirit,” marked the 70th

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# Plioplys

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anniversary of the beginning of mass deportations from Lithuania and the other Baltic republics to Siberia, the inaccessible and inhospitable winter wasteland of northern Asia. Stalin, one of the early members of the Communist regime that turned Russia into the Soviet Union for most of the 20th century, established penal colonies and camps for forced labor as a means to not only punish criminals, but also to remove any perceived anti-Soviet threats from occupied countries.

From 1940 until Stalin's death in 1953, about 600,000 people were deported from the Baltic states, many of them women and children. They lived harsh and desperate lives, and many of them died untimely deaths. Some of the "crimes" that resulted in deportation included belonging to the wrong political party or the wrong religion or having ties to a foreign country. Eight members of Plioplys' family were deported, and four died at the hands of the Soviet secret police.

In the early 1970s, letters and photographs from Lithuanian deportees were collected and used for several projects. But then, the collection disappeared for a number of years. After extensive searching, Plioplys managed to locate about



**Andy Plioplys will exhibit at Beverly Unitarian Church during the Beverly Art Walk. (Review photo)**

a third of the original collection, 400 documents, in a mislabeled box. These letters and photographs formed the basis of "Hope and Spirit" and "Siberian Souls."

"By finding and saving over 400 letters and photographs sent from Siberia, the tragic family stories have been revealed," Plioplys said. "I am proud to be able to bring them back from oblivion."

Plioplys, who lives in North Beverly, earned his medical degree from the University of  
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## Plioplys

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Chicago and has established a distinguished practice as a neurologist. He has investigated cognitive disorders, from autism in children to Alzheimer's disease in the elderly. His dual passions for art and science have led him to merge the two in many of his works.

"Siberian Souls" is designed as a series of light columns. Each column consists of three layers of polycarbonate, a type of durable thermoplastic. The bottom layers include portraits of those deported to Siberia, and their hand-written letters.

Plioplys placed the portraits in deeper layers to give them a hazy, ghost-like appearance. The outer layer brings in the neurology and science connection, and it contains images of his own neural networks, brain-scan images and brain-wave tracings. Each column is back-lit by color-changing LED light systems.

There are also companion prints on paper that deal primarily with letters written by children deported to Siberia and their photographs.

"The images consist of neuronal profiles, intertwined with my own MRI brain scans, electroencephalograms and transformations of my own

previous artwork. It is these extensive, overlapping neuronal networks that encode our memories, which include memories of those who were dear to us," said Plioplys. "If someone remembers you after you pass, in a sense you are immortal. By using my own neuronal patterns and networks, I am trying to give these individuals a degree of immortality."

There are white-light companion pieces to each of the color columns. These are currently being shown in another exhibit in Grand Rapids, Mich., that is sponsored by the American Civil Liberties Union. The theme of the show is social justice.

Plioplys sees more than just a similarity between the 1940s and today's political climate, with its calls for deportation based on religion and ethnic origin.

"Right now, we have a situation in the U.S. very much like Stalin in the 1940s," said Plioplys. "We have 40 percent of the country saying they support deportation of massive numbers of people. We would be sending as many as 11 million people into unknown, dangerous situations. We would be destroying lives, possibly even killing these people. We can look at the Siberian souls as a warning. History is definitely repeating itself."

Jennifer Cottrill, chairper-

son of the Beverly Unitarian Church Worship Committee, echoed those sentiments.

"As Andy has stated many times, the purpose of the 'Hope and Spirit' project was to remember the past so that history does not repeat itself," said Cottrill. "We as a congregation view preventing such atrocities from happening again as part of the goal of peace, liberty and justice to which we aspire."

Beverly Unitarian Church is located in the historic Givens Castle. Cottrill offered the Castle as another reason to visit the exhibit.

"Many community members are curious about the architecture of our historic building," said Cottrill. "Coming to see 'Siberia Souls' is an excellent opportunity to see the interior of the building as well as to inform yourself about a period in history not often discussed—and to view some stunning art!"



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