

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

EXHIBIT WARNS OF HISTORY REPEATING ITSELF

By Carol Flynn

The Beverly Unitarian Church, 10244 S. Longwood Dr. is hosting the art exhibit *Siberia Souls* by Audrius (Andy) P. Plioplys through Oct. 9. Viewing hours are Saturdays, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., and Sundays, 12 to 2 p.m. On Oct. 1, as part of the Beverly Art Walk, the exhibit will be open 12 to 7 p.m. Admission is free.

Plioplys, an M.D. with a specialty in neuroscience who lives in North Beverly, is known for the unique way he merges art with science. Evolving his style over 40 years, his work interweaves brain scan and nerve pathway images with pictures and words to explore thinking and consciousness. *Siberia Souls* has added another dimension to his work, a strong stand on social justice.

In 2012, Plioplys organized the Hope and Spirit project, the purpose of which was to remember Lithuanian citizens who were forcibly transported to labor camps and other settlements in Siberia in the 1940s by Joseph Stalin, leader of the Soviet Union from the mid-1920s to 1953. The deportations provided free labor, and repressed resistance to Soviet occupation by people they considered "anti-Soviet elements."

Plioplys, through extensive research and investigation, recovered some 400 letters and photographs from those deported to Siberia, that made up about a third of a collection here in Chicago that was feared lost. These materials form the basis for *Siberia Souls*.

"Four of my blood relatives died during secret police interrogations, and eight were deported to Siberia," said Plioplys. "The primary purpose of this project was to inform the general public of these events, and the deaths of 20 million innocent people that resulted from Stalin. If history is forgotten, it will repeat itself. Now *Siberia Souls* serves as a sounding valve, because history is repeating itself, right here in the U. S. Forty per cent of the public supports deporting people into unknown, dangerous situations, destroying their lives and possibly leading to their deaths."

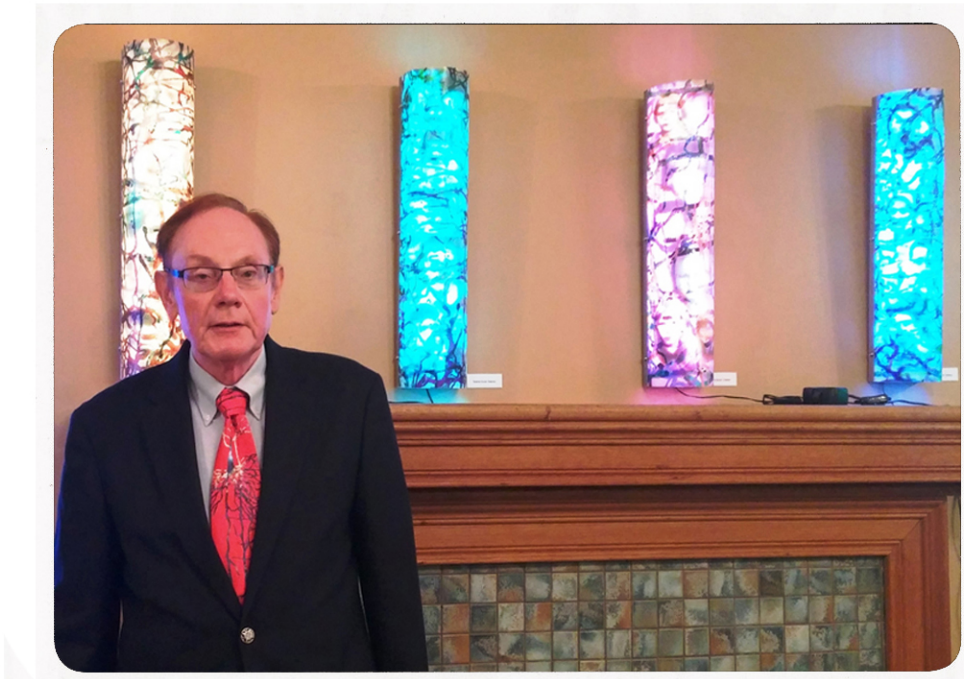
Siberia Souls is a series of color-changing light columns. Each column consists of three layers of polycarbonate, a type of durable thermoplastic. The bottom layers include portraits of those deported to Siberia, and their hand written letters. Plioplys placed the portraits in deeper layers to give them a hazy, ghost-like appearance. The outer layer contains images of brain scans and neuronal networks, which are the connections of nerve cells throughout our bodies that transmit information. Each column is then back-lit by color-changing LED lights.

"It is these extensive, overlapping neuronal networks that encode our memories, which include memories of those who were dear to us," said Plioplys, explaining some of the elements of the design. "The three layers of images correspond to our own three levels

THE VILLAGER

BROUGHT TO YOU BY THE BEVERLY AREA PLANNING ASSOCIATION | October 2016 | Vol. 36 | No. 10

Beverly Area Planning Assn.
1987 W. 111th St.
Chicago, IL 60643



Audrius Plioplys with his exhibit at the Beverly Unitarian Church. Photo by C. Flynn.

of awareness: consciousness, sub-consciousness and unconsciousness. And as the transmitted colors change, the images change dramatically.”

The exhibit also includes a sequence of prints on paper. These deal primarily with letters written by the children deported to Siberia, and their photographs.

The Beverly Unitarian Church decided to show the exhibit because it aligns with the basic principles of its Unitarian Universalist covenant, according to Jennifer Cottrill, Chair of the Church’s Worship Committee.

“The principles include the inherent worth and dignity of every human being and the goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all,” said Cottrill. “The atrocities that Stalin committed were affronts to the millions of human lives they claimed. We as a congregation view preventing such atrocities from happening again.”

In recognition of his work organizing Hope and Spirit, Plioplys was named Man of the Year by the Balzekas Museum of Lithuanian Culture in Chicago.

“One way to look at immortality is that people remember you,” said Plioplys. “I am proud to be able to bring the stories of these people back from oblivion.”