

The Historic Role and Significance of the Sculpture of Jeffrey Rubinoff

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The proposed development of The Jeffrey Rubinoff Sculpture Park, to house and present the collected works of Jeffrey Rubinoff, comes at a particularly propitious time, not merely for the sake of recording and maintaining a distinctive and important contribution to contemporary art, but also for the sake of protecting and advancing a conception of the purpose of art that dominated more than half of the twentieth century and that marked a significant and indispensable contribution to aesthetic thought. Not only is Rubinoff's sculpture an inheritor of an historic movement in the progress of Western Art, it also constitutes one of the few ongoing continuations of the authentic impulses of Modernism. As such, Rubinoff's sculpture is itself an important inheritance, one that has an undeniable significance for what has become an international art world and that ought to be preserved and made available for viewing by an international audience.

As one of the most significant bodies of sculptural work created by a member of perhaps the last generation of abstract sculptors working in the manner and with the aims of Modern Art, the sculpture of Rubinoff possesses a two-fold importance in a time of Postmodern Art, a time in which the intentions of Modern Art and

specifically of abstraction in art have been largely ignored by several generations of artists now trained in increasingly theory-driven art schools to create visual art that is self-consciously innovative yet that lacks the ambitious agenda of Modern Art.

Rubinoff's sculpture is itself an exemplary instance of the authentic mode of art, which practices the intentions of the artistic revolution that marked the twentieth century as one of the most profound periods in the history of the Western World, not only in art but in high-temperature thought in numerous fields of inquiry. As such, there is an inestimable value to be had in keeping the collection together and maintaining it on one site: few if any other collections of the works of Modern Artists have been localized, made available for viewing in their entirety, with all, or nearly all, the works in a single location. Since the beginning of Modernism, the art world has become fully international, and most of the works of the significant contributors have been distributed throughout art collections around the world. A sculpture park devoted to Rubinoff's work would be perhaps the only example of an important body of Modern Art works collected together at one site.

Further than that, the works of Jeffrey Rubinoff are fully representative of the underlying principles of Modern Art—they are as a body of work successful and clear examples of the Modern Art idea—and so their presentation together serves as a preservation not only of the artworks but also of the intentions of Modern Art. At a time in which art museums around the world increasingly are acquiring works of Postmodern Art in pursuit of audiences of tourists and large attendance figures, the value of the collected body of Rubinoff's work, both as a resource in the future for academic study and as an ongoing educational opportunity to present and promote the ideas of Modern

Art, cannot be over-estimated. Taken together, Rubinoff's sculptural works are the mark not only of a significant artist but also of an ongoing moment in art history.

Rubinoff's sculpture is among the few continuing bodies of work to practice the art of abstraction in sculpture—not merely as a formal mode in which certain structures are distributed in space according to principles of artistic composition, but as a deliberate and studied pursuit of the objectives that abstraction—the culminating achievement of Modernism in the arts—was initially devised to attain: as an aesthetic meditation on matters that are not merely the initiation of new artistic forms. Abstraction, as it has been practiced by Postmodern artists, has moved into what has become known as Formalism—the invention and deployment of novel artistic forms that expand the artistic vocabulary but that posit nothing in the way of insights or realizations concerning matters beyond the profession of art and the art market. In essence, such works are merely matters of inventive design—innovations that greet the eye with compositions not done before but that have nothing to say.

Rubinoff's manner of abstraction is a conscientious effort to pursue the original and authentic purpose of abstraction: to reveal a portion of truth—not to practice art simply for its own sake but to seek an insight into the nature of reality itself, the nature of that which lies beyond art, of that which lies beyond the appearances that abstract art was devised to dispense with. Abstraction is, in essence, a manner of deep contemplation, a means of focusing the attention to a rumination on the very nature of the real, and to render what is realized in forms and compositions that arise with an inexplicable necessity and that possess an articulate visual vocabulary that itself withstands explanation. Authentic abstraction is an attempt to strike deep into the

appearances of reality that surround us and to disclose, in a visual language that creates itself and that appears strangely translucent, mysteriously legible to the sensitive observing mind, some sense of the truth that those appearances conceal.

Abstraction in its true manner is an ambitious artistic project, one that arose during one of the most remarkable periods of intellectual adventure in the history of Western civilization and whose real purpose has been maintained for decades strictly through the devotion of artists who understood the aspiration of the mode. Over the course of the twentieth century, that authentic purpose entered the history books, and artists such as Rubinoff have continued the astonishingly hard work of creating it, seeking to pass it on to future artists who can appreciate its promise. In every generation, there are young artists who seek to practice the profound seriousness that abstraction demands, as well as devotees of the arts who desire to view the valid results of the abstract project, and it is an imperative of art education to offer them a possibility to study works that display the abstract ambition successfully achieved.

The History of the Modernist Idea

To appreciate fully the importance of Rubinoff's work and of presenting it for public viewing, it is necessary to examine the development of Modern Art and the ambitious ideas for art that it represents, ideas that Rubinoff has been among the few artists to continue to practice since the principal period of Modernism, ideas that have been disregarded by Postmodern Art.

Modernism in the arts was only a portion of a more extensive cultural revolution of thought that extended through the sciences and philosophy, constituting—along with Classical Greece and the Italian Renaissance—one of the three renaissances of thought in the history of Western civilization. Modernism had its beginnings in the 1870s and 1880s, a time in which the primary assumptions that underlie what had been the accepted worldview for centuries began to break down. The conception of reality that had come to maturity in the Enlightenment was one in which the universe was viewed as an organization of material objects and the forces that drive them, a coherent system of interacting bodies that obeyed mathematical laws with complete clarity and ultimate predictability. The universe was a rational machine, and the human mind was capable of comprehending it with such precision that it was assumed, once all scientific laws had been worked through, that all future events could be foreseen.

Prior to the initiation of the Modernist era, this worldview had been under increasing assault for approximately 100 years. The Romantic Movement in the arts had begun to envision and attempted to see into an alternate reality, a truth that differed from the appearances of this world and that could be intuited by the immersion in unadulterated nature—an almost mystical vision could be obtained from the natural landscape, as distinct from the urban environment that was growing in the United States and through Europe. At the same time, German Idealist philosophy, and particularly the ideas of the German philosopher Immanuel Kant, propounded that the visible universe, the material world in which we believe we exist, was demonstrably an illusion—reality could be proved to be something other than what we see.

By the last decades of the nineteenth century, the beginnings of an advance on the Romantic worldview began to emerge. The first gestures occurred in French poetry, particularly in the works of Baudelaire and Rimbaud, who went beyond the Romantic poets' sense of another reality to be intuited through the exposure to unsullied nature, who posited, in thoughts that seem in retrospect to be astonishingly prescient, that the visible world could be seen through, that a presentiment of reality could be discovered and disclosed by the artist. They were followed by another French poet, Stéphane Mallarmé, who developed a new aesthetic that rejected the reality of the visible world and asserted the sole purpose of art was the revelation of the hidden truth, a truth that could be revealed by no means other than artistic insight.

Mallarmé's new aesthetic spread throughout the Parisian art world and became the foundation of what we now recognize as the beginning of the Modernist movement. His thinking influenced not only the Symbolist poets but also the painters and composers of the time, including the Impressionist painters and such composers as Debussy and Ravel. The Impressionist painters are now recognized as attempting to observe and represent in their work the fleeting moment of reality—the split-second play of light and shadow that is momentary and never repeated, as if reality were ephemeral and nearly impossible to grasp. It can as easily be argued that the most advanced Impressionist painting, particularly the later work of Monet, was an attempt to conceive of a dissolving of the visible world, a dissipation of the veil of appearances behind which the truth of the world can begin to show through.

At roughly this same time, the worldview of the Enlightenment began to break down in both science and philosophy. In the 1880s, the framework of Newtonian

physics, which can be said to be the foundation of the entire philosophy of the Enlightenment, took a jolt from which it would not recover. The Michelson-Morley experiments, which were conducted repeatedly over the course of the decade, proved that the speed of light was a constant, unchanging in its measurement regardless of the viewpoint from which it is observed. Under Newtonian mechanics, this result is supposed to be impossible. The experiments put physics into a crisis from which it would not recover until Einstein solved the mystery of the unchanging velocity of light at the beginning of the twentieth century, and with his Special Theory of Relativity of 1905, the reliability of the solidity of the material world ended. The physical attributes of objects, such as their length and mass, were no longer inherent within them, no longer intrinsic qualities whose real nature was not a matter of mere appearance, qualities that did not depend on how they were viewed. With Einstein, the stability of the visible, material world became unmoored.

And again, at the same time, during the 1870s and 1880s, philosophy changed in a similar manner. The philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, who was well aware of the developments in the science and art of his time, proposed a theory of reality in which the visible world was a product of human imagination and the truth that lay beyond what our senses could reveal to us was also beyond all conception, except as a function of a particular artistic vision, what he referred to as a tragic art, or a “Dionysian art.” Moving beyond the philosophical views he inherited from a preceding century of German philosophical thought, Nietzsche conceived a world that in truth was pure energy—fluid, in a state of constant change, and ultimately unimaginable. For him, only art could provide us with images and forms of imagination that would convey something

of its nature, for art, when done properly, when pursued for its original purpose, is not a matter of decoration or the communication of ideas but is specifically our method for seeing into the hidden recesses of the world, into a nature we are capable of intuiting because we ourselves are portions of it.

There is a common theme that can be located among the breakthroughs that occurred in all the principal fields of serious inquiry at this time. In art, science, and philosophy, it was discovered that the appearances of the world are not literally true, that the truth of the universe is essentially different from what we observe. The power of rationality, of reasoning out the truth, became qualified, to say the least—the world was no longer considered to be a perfectly rational construction, no longer the clockwork mechanism that it was seen to be during the Enlightenment and under the influence of Newtonian science, no longer a mechanism that the human mind eventually could completely comprehend. Physics had to struggle, and has continued to struggle, to devise theories that were and are accepted to be incomplete and can be held only tentatively—none can be literally true and every theory will eventually be overthrown by an improved theory. Philosophy moved away from the belief that the world beyond our perceptions is ultimately explicable, and art increasingly shifted away from the depiction of the world as the rational mind perceives it.

However, the most salient quality held in common among the changes of approach and ambition in all these fields of thought is the devising of altered protocols to govern the search for truth. With the recognition that the world is not what it appears to be, with the realization that the truth lies elsewhere, somewhere other than what we observe, there came the need to seek the truth of things anew. Physics adopted new tools

of observation and new mathematical tools for the building of theories (Einstein's special and general theories of relativity are but two examples), philosophy took its lead increasingly from art rather than science, and art turned away from the representation of appearances and to a new set of dispensations—art moved to Expressionism, Surrealism, and most significantly in the search for a truth beyond us, abstraction. It is the devotion to the disclosure of the hidden depths of truth that has marked the progress of Modernist Art. In essence, the determining characteristic and the common element defining Modernism in the arts is the pursuit of the truth of the world.

This was the core purpose behind the invention of abstract art, which occurred in 1911, just a few years after Einstein's publication of the Special Theory of Relativity, his first theory of relativity, and that was no accident. With the scientific proposal that the world was not as it seemed, the visual arts initiated a complete break with the visual appearance of the world. Wassily Kandinsky, who created abstract painting, wrote extensively about the intentions he felt must be accepted into art, and he is utterly clear about the purpose of non-representational painting. In his view, art is an intrinsically spiritual project, the method by which the spirit develops and grows—it “bears within it the seeds of the future and awakens the strings of the soul.” The growth of the soul is measured by its movement into ever increasing knowledge. The soul grows as a matter of spiritual insight: “The spiritual life, to which art belongs and in which it is one of the most powerful agents, is a complex but definite movement forward and upward—a progress, moreover, that can be translated into simple terms. This progress is the progress of knowledge.” That knowledge is clearly introspective—a knowledge of the inner self, of the depths of one's own spirit—but for Kandinsky, it is more than that. Art

also fosters the development of the soul into a greater knowledge of the world at large, of the outer truth. Abstract art dismisses reproduction of the appearances of the material world in order to bring about insight into the non-material nature of the truth. It points toward “the non-naturalistic, the abstract, toward inner nature,” not the inner nature of the self but the inner truth of the world, the reality hidden within appearances. For art organizes not just the introspective attention but also our perceptions of the world. Speaking of the impressions of the world around us as “fortuitous sounds” that strike our senses, Kandinsky observed: “A force is required to put these fortuitous sounds of the universe into systematic combinations for systematic effect on the soul. This force is art.”

Kandinsky devised abstract art to be the art necessary to its time, the art needed at a moment in which the worldview of a material, rational, comprehensible universe was being superseded by a new vision of the external truth. (Kandinsky also wrote about the science of his time and about Nietzsche.) Just as the new worldview of science and philosophy has only advanced and grown more sophisticated over the course of the last 100 years, so too the artistic purpose of abstraction has become more pertinent and imperative: to take the impressions we receive of the world and organize and transform them into a comprehension of the nature of the world beyond what we merely observe—to change information into deep understanding. The forms that compose the abstract artwork are responsive to and, for the spirit, indicative of the nature of a truth that is not reflected by outward appearances, what Kandinsky called an “abstract” truth, a truth that must be realized in the mind—they take the place of false representations. They are forms devised to invoke realization.

Abstract art thus is the culmination and the chief innovation of Modernism in the arts, and since the initial flourish of Modernism, instances of the mode can be located in literature and in music—such as the books of James Joyce and the poems of T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, and the atonal music of Arnold Schönberg, Alban Berg, and Anton Webern—as well as in painting and sculpture. In the visual arts, the orientation on spiritual insight and on uncovering the truth of the world clearly continued in the works, and was indicated in the writings, of many of the principal innovators of abstract modes who followed Kandinsky. Mondrian was a devotee to theosophy, creating his art to demonstrate the underlying structural truth of the world, as was the Transcendental Painting Group, a collection of artists in the southwestern United States who created abstract paintings and maintained the authentic dedication to abstract art during the 1930s.

Other innovators moved more toward a psychological or scientific approach to the idea of abstraction, artists such as Kasimir Malevich and Naum Gabo. Gabo particularly, in his creation of Constructivism, argued art to be the method by which a new conception of the universe is transformed into a comprehension that was to be available to anyone capable of responding to abstraction in art. In all these arms of the abstract art movement, the orientation remained on truth-telling, on a purpose beyond pure artistic innovation.

This orientation remained in place right through to Abstract Expressionism in the 1950s and 1960s. Jackson Pollock famously remarked once that “I am nature,” by which it is now generally recognized that he felt his work was not divorced from the natural world but that it was as closely tied to nature as is

representational painting, responding to nature and portraying its reality by means that merely differed from those of representation, through a visual language that had a content and that required a visual literacy on the part of the viewer to be properly understood. In a joint statement, the Abstract Expressionist painters Mark Rothko, Adolph Gottlieb, and Barnett Newman overtly asserted that abstract art has content, has a meaning: “There is no such thing as a good painting about nothing. We assert that the subject is crucial . . . That is why we profess a spiritual kinship with primitive and archaic art.” Their point, in short, is that painting of any kind, and from any period in history, has to participate in the great themes of all art, which are invariably the great themes of individual revelation, the great themes of spiritual insight, in order to qualify as something great. There is no great art without taking on the questions that have driven high-temperature thought throughout the ages.

Once the initial phase of Abstract Expressionism had achieved its fullest success, new forms of art developed that had little in common with the means or serious-mindedness of Modern Art. By the early 1960s, the attention of many gallery owners, museum curators, and members of the art public, as well as the academicians who direct university art programs and write contemporary art history, was captured by Pop Art, Conceptual Art, New Media Art, Installation Art, and a wide array of other novel and deliberately anomalous methods for the creation of art. These are the varieties of Postmodern Art, which is distinguished from the Modernist work that preceded it for close to a century by more than just methods and materials. Postmodern Art is, at best, loosely based on a body of largely French philosophical theory, which, transposed from the field of general cultural criticism and Continental Philosophy, has served as the

justification, and to a great extent a simple excuse, for works of art that have been essentially market driven.

Up through the time of Abstract Expressionism, little money was to be had by creating art—the price structures for contemporary art bore no resemblance to those of Old Masters sales, a situation that has now changed completely. After the emergence of the first instances of Postmodern Art—the first works that were neither traditional sculpture nor painting—a deliberate effort was made to create a broad art market, one that would be lucrative in the way that serious sculpture and painting had, on the whole, never been. The fodder for the market were works of art that often were and are devised to wear their innovation on their sleeves, frequently to the exclusion of all other aesthetic virtues—they advertise themselves as something unusual and intriguing. They have been created to be essentially attractive—work that are prepossessing, decoratively magnetic, and stylistically becoming. (Warhol is the principal example of this.) Above all, they are in no manner threatening or disconcerting. Art was made friendly in order to make money, and serious-mindedness may be imaginatively and intellectually thrilling, but it is not blandly agreeable.

In short, an art market was made by making works of art into pure commodities, works intended to appeal to a superficial interest in mere innovation, to create mass interest by becoming a tourist attraction, to appeal to a tourist's mild thirst to observe what has made itself current, what is momentarily absorbing for being unusual—a tourist's interest in seeing the artistic "sites," and the interest of those in the market to own the "product." Young artists who feel the ambition to pursue their creativity have been trained in little more than the currently successful (marketable)

modes of art and have been left by their art educations unfamiliar with the imaginative and intellectual rigor that serious work requires, not to speak of the sheer mastery of craft necessary to accomplish sculpture or painting. The great adventure of discovering the truth of the real has been replaced by the complacency and cynicism of setting and meeting market expectations for the sake of nothing beyond profit. The value of the creation of art that is capable of inspiring future generations of artists to pursue the grandest aesthetic ambitions, that is capable of instigating through its influence future art of the highest order, has been replaced by sheer market worth. Whereas these motives are not characteristic of all work that is now considered Postmodern, this is the logic that continues to drive the ongoing art market.

The theories that serve as the intellectual substance of Postmodern works are often little more than the theoretical polish that creates the veneer of intentions as opaque and, therefore, superficially and futilely intriguing as many of these works themselves. However, even in the case of Postmodern Art in which a theoretical foundation actually is being employed to direct the underlying act of imagination—and although they are the minority, there are a number of Postmodern artists who do illustrate intellectual ambition—the theoretical structure demonstrates a complete departure from the tenets, and the courage, of Modernist thought and practice.

Postmodern Theory is a loosely related body of philosophical work that argues the impossibility of determining truth in any regard. According the general drift of Postmodern thought, our beliefs about reality are culturally determined—the social environment in which we live determines how we see the world, how we respond to it, and what we think of it. Of what lies beyond our perceptions, nothing can be determined.

All we know is what we experience, and what we experience is what we are driven to formulate for ourselves. To attempt to go further is mere pretension. And so, for philosophy, or science, or art to attempt to locate truth—what really is the case beyond our culturally specific perceptions and ideas—is hopeless. The only serious study for any of these fields of inquiry is the cultural codes that determine what we see and believe—the study of the intellectual environment in which we function and by which we are, it may be said, deluded.

Of course, it is implicit that all cultural environments make the same claim to truthfulness, which is not much of a claim at all but all that is possible under this dispensation of thought, and so a general relativism of values subsequently holds. All visions of truth are as “truthful” as all others. But the authentic enterprise of truth-telling, not the report and analysis of systems of culturally determined belief but the search for the truth of things itself, is to be forsaken. Put more simply, under the auspices of Postmodernism, Modernism must be seen as a preening arrogance, and a foolhardy project.

And here, again, the cynicism shows through. The rejection of the search for truth amounts to a mocking of the highest ambitions of the human spirit, to a supercilious dismissal of ambition, high-mindedness, sheer curiosity, and all desire for authenticity. In no other field of serious inquiry would this attitude be found acceptable. From the point of vantage point of the Postmodern, not just art but civilization itself becomes a frivolous engagement.

From the point of view of the art market and the art writing that follows popularity as if it were a judgment of intrinsic worth, it would seem that Postmodern Art

is the trend of our time and that Modernism has been abandoned by all artists. But this is not and can hardly be true. Art history is inevitably a process of vast over-simplification, creating the impression that, period by period, all practicing artists change their manner to conform to the prevailing modes of the time. Obviously, this cannot be true, and it is not the case that abstraction was relegated to the scrap heap of history when Postmodern Art became the dominant artistic practice. Many artists have continued to practice abstract art, Rubinoff among the principal ones. The ambitions of abstraction, and with it the ambitions of Modernism, have not been forsaken—the most adventurous art of our era is still being undertaken, and the possibility of art that pursues an investigation of the truth of the world remains available.

The Artistic Ambition of Rubinoff's Sculpture

The art of Jeffrey Rubinoff is one of the current leading examples of abstract sculpture created under the authentic impulse of the abstract mode, and as such, it is one of the few bodies of contemporary work capable of instructing artists and the art public in the capabilities and the efficacies of abstraction. Rubinoff started his artistic career as a member of the generation of artists who followed the Abstract Expressionists—he began at a time in which Postmodern Art was only just emerging, and he chose to remain true to the cause of abstraction. His earliest work is responsive to and reminiscent of the sculpture of David Smith—one of the few sculptors, if not the only sculptor, who has been considered an Abstract Expressionist—but his art has progressed and developed its language of form continuously through his career. As a result, to see

his work collected together, and to follow it through its self-initiating phases, is to see not only the personal history of the sculptor but to witness the spontaneous working through of the impulse to abstraction. His works, seen together, tell the story that abstract art seeks to convey.

The heart of his artistic endeavor is the heart of the abstract imagination—the creation, by means of aesthetic rumination, of non-representational forms that are redolent of implications larger than themselves, the direct rendering of inklings of things we seem to know and yet for which we cannot account: the unearthing of hidden knowledge, the revealing of the mind, and the things it comprehends, to itself. It is, in short, the development of visual metaphors, the disclosure of the symbol-making capability of the imagination and the exploration of the symbols that spontaneously arise as the potency of the imagination to reveal what it holds is released.

At the center of this enterprise—both that of Rubinoff's art and of abstraction, which are precisely the same thing—is a simple proposition: that the exploration of the inner recesses of the mind (or if one likes, of the spirit) is as well an exploration of the outer world, that the mind comprehends more of reality than it normally reveals to itself and that only through giving release through art to the substance of imaginative thought can the greater understanding of the truth of the world be discovered. The inner world is directly connected to the outer world, the delving of one is an exploit into the other—this is the very essence of the Modernist project, the very core of abstraction. To proceed in this manner is not the Postmodern proposition, it is not the trading in culturally biased interpretations of reality, all of which possess an equal validity, or invalidity—it is to pursue a difficult and obscure road directly toward the

truth of things. The personal impulse toward the truth, followed out by methods that have been developed by artists for more than a century, rewards the effort. As Kandinsky proposed, and as Rubinoff specifically believes, consciousness can proceed in an ever expanding development, it can grow, and is so doing can grow into an every greater understanding of the real.

To say this is as much as to say that abstraction is always abstraction—abstract art has a method and goal in common with abstract thought, the protocol of thought that lies at the center of science and philosophy. Just as an abstract idea in science and philosophy is a proposition regarding reality presented on its own terms—a proposition *per se*, in the *abstract*—so a successful work of abstract art is a direct perception of the real *per se*, in the *abstract*. It is not a realization applied and demonstrated in a specific instance, it is not an applied truth—the abstract is a law of the real, a principle of the world.

Yet, abstraction in art is different from abstraction in science, or in philosophy. It is the function of both science and philosophy to practice a social role—they are conceived and phrased in imaginative languages that serve to communicate with a ready reliability. A scientific law is capable of being understood the same way by everyone trained in its procedures and its mathematical language. Philosophy, when it is successful, works the same way. Both are meant to convey, and this orients the nature of their languages of thought, and of their conceptions. Art is more individual, and yet it seeks to achieve the universal, and the communicable, through following with dedication the individual impulse. We know why science and philosophy

communicate, we understand the scientific method and the procedures of logic, but art, in its investigation of the mystery of the real, is mysterious.

Nevertheless, art works, as we can see by following the work of Rubinoff, and by observing with sensitivity the story it tells as we chart its course of development. The earliest work is geometric—essential forms of construction, the basic forms of Euclidean geometry, compounding upon each other, raising themselves from the ground, attempting to rise about the earth, above gravity, assembling themselves and pulling themselves erect. As the work progresses, the forms proliferate and the assemblies grow in complexity—vectors strike out in new directions, forms combine into formulas for the occupation of space, arrangements of geometric elements are reflected in vacancies of similar shape, positive forms duplicated in negative space, as the very schema of the spatial extension, of the void, is charted and structured, as if it were revealing and disposing itself. Here is the very nature of reality, of the world on its own terms, the world all that exists must occupy and whose laws of existence it must obey. But as the work progresses further, something more arises—the forms of the work change their laws, and what is structurally different, more sinuous and vivid, emerges. In works such as those of the *Andromeda*, *Cassiopeia*, and *Xeno* series, the development of organic forms comes about. The animated arises from the structural, the gestural from the geometric, complexity comparable to life comes spontaneously out of the simplest of elements. And in the works of the *Hunter* series, the transformation of the nature of form reaches a culmination. There is a lithe and fluid elegance to these sculptures, a lilting sway to their implicit motions, that achieves a rendition of pure grace. That which only life can attempt, that which marks the very nature of life—the smooth and graceful

movement, the ballet of pure feeling—has arisen from the most rudimentary components of form.

There is a lesson in this work, a lesson most evident when the works are viewed together, viewed as a progress of the life of the imagination: we witness here what the imagination sees in everything, and what it does. The imaginative life discovers and envisions the living impulse—not just in the mind of the dreamer, of the artist and those who observe and visually touch the artist’s work, but in the world, for that is the formula of the imagination. We see images that convey—not through the literal reproduction of things in the world but in forms that speak of deep comprehensions—a felt understanding of the processes of life, the dynamic impulse in things that has produced and continues to produce life in a universe of otherwise dead matter. The imagination, brought to the action of artistic conception, sees not only into itself, into its own animating capability, but into the world that engendered it—into that from which it came. And every act of imagination derives another, the dream of the artist incurs the dreaming of the viewer of art, and with work such as that of Rubinoff, we begin to witness from whence we came.

What is at Stake

This is a lesson regarding the very nature of art, regarding what art is capable of, what it is purposed to do, when it is practiced with authenticity and a dedication to accomplish what can be achieved in no other way. This is a lesson that cannot be lost, for such art ever remains a perpetual possibility. But it must be protected,

otherwise it will be unavailable to generations of artists and will have to be rediscovered, as it has had to be rediscovered numerous times in the past.

There is something more that is at risk of abandonment in this, something more than the methods and objectives of abstract art, which have become largely unknown to young artists who chase innovation rather than authenticity and notoriety in place of inspiration. The principles of Postmodern thought, which reach beyond the chambers of university departments and academic publications and conferences through the auspices of art galleries and museum exhibitions, promote a mitigation of the very idea of truth and, thereby, a quality of provinciality. If all cultural contexts have equal claim to “truthfulness,” then the very meaning of unmitigated truth, of universal truth, is under assault and, with it, the deepest forms of honesty. More than that, the provinciality of believing every group has its own cultural code, as valid as every other, instigates an ethical relativism that undermines the very idea of morality. If every community defines morality in its own way, then there is no ultimate arbiter of right and wrong. Taken far enough, such ideas imply that everyone has his own principles of conduct, and nothing anyone does is capable of being wrong. Put simply, under total cultural relativism, there are no universal human rights. We are all our own judges.

Further still, the implications for art as a primary mode of intellectual inquiry, as a major participant in the adventure of knowledge, are great. During the initial period of Modernism, all the fields of cutting-edge investigation were coordinated. Kandinsky, Gabo, and many others were aware, at least in general terms, of the discoveries of science and were inspired by them. Science has continued in the same spirit, for science cannot be Postmodern. It cannot practice under a mitigated standard of

truth, under a variable yardstick of accuracy, for science has a reality check—it conducts experiments, and what it proposes must work, and it must work under all conditions, not just in the places and societies that accept it. Science pursues truth, without qualification. At present, science is the heart of the ongoing intellectual adventure, and art that is created under the rubric of the Postmodern has fallen behind. Such works of art are in danger of becoming nothing more than entertainment—it can be easily argued that to a great extent they already have. If the artistic enterprise is to remain what it has been at its best, at its most venturesome—a principal part of the experiment of human comprehension—then it must maintain its commitment to its core principles, the principles that have always been at the forefront of Modern Art.

The Value of The Jeffrey Rubinoff Sculpture Park

To retain the authentic objectives of art requires something more than the commitment of artists who understand what art truly is and what it can accomplish. It demands the commitment as well of art institutions, which should retain a sense of mission and be something more than a showroom of whatever work has obtained notoriety in its time. We are now in a moment in which art museums and art festivals, which are in many ways taking on the functions of commercial art galleries, too frequently are devoted to the new and the notorious, regardless of its nature.

This situation makes clear the potential contribution and educational value of a sculpture park devoted to the work of Jeffrey Rubinoff. Rubinoff's sculpture represents more than an idea. It represents an ideal for art. As a center not only for the

display of this work but also for the dissemination of the ideas the work enacts among the artists and the members of the art public who will inevitably be drawn to this facility, the value of park is impossible to estimate. Those of us committed to art in its authentic sense will look forward to the role the park unquestionably will play in the international art world.