

**The Significance of the Relationship
of Jeffrey Rubinoff's Sculpture to its Environment**

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Biography of Shahana Rajani

Shahana Rajani is a MA student in the Critical and Curatorial Studies program of the University of British Columbia, following BA History of Art from the University of Cambridge. She was the Curator of the Karachi School of Art Gallery, as well as an event manager for TEDxKarachi, focussed on the dialogue on innovative ideas. Since 2009 she has lead a public awareness campaign in using new media various social realities in Pakistan. Through workshops for school children she tackles issues such as terrorism, women's rights, education and environmental degradation. Rajani was also a lecturer of Art History at Karachi University, where she covered modern and post-modern art movements to second and third year undergraduate Fine Arts students. Rajani also curated a photography exhibition at the Citizens Archive of Pakistan titled 'New Nation, New Freedom, New Responsibility' on the contributions of women in the early decades of Pakistan.

Relationship between sculpture and outdoor spaces has always been in a state of flux, adapting to changing contexts. Recent scholarship has been increasingly interested in tracing this dynamic relationship, surveying historically significant moments in the formation of the Georgian landscape garden, the Victorian urban park, the outdoor spaces of twentieth century modernism and the late twentieth century phenomenon of the sculpture park.¹ While sculpture was mostly a secondary consideration in the design of the Victorian urban parks, the late twentieth century sculpture park is purpose built for the display of sculpture. Whilst patrons of sculpture parks are mostly local authorities and Arts and Heritage funding bodies, the Jeffrey Rubinoff Sculpture Park was established by the sculptor Jeffrey Rubinoff himself, for the sole purpose of displaying and preserving his works. While sculpture parks run by local authorities form a means of managing access to the countryside and to historical landscapes, the Jeffrey Rubinoff Sculpture Park – developed over a period of thirty-five years – provides a permanent home for the artist's own artworks.

Upon exploring the sculpture park, it becomes evident that the site of display is an integral part of experiencing the sculptures. Through form, mass and colour, the sculptures form dynamic relations with the surrounding landscape. Rubinoff's decision to display his sculpture outdoors is a critical curatorial act; a positioning that suggests particular meanings for the artworks and particular ways of viewing his artistic production.

In choosing to move away from the gallery space and creating a sculpture park, Rubinoff encourages an experience of viewing that is radically different from visiting a gallery. Institutional critique, as early as 1970, highlighted the idealist hermeticism of the gallery space of display. The modern gallery or museum space – with its white walls, artificial lighting, controlled climate and pristine architectonics – is coded with mechanisms that actively disassociate the space of art from the outer world, furthering the institution's idealist imperative of rendering itself and its hierarchy of values objective, disinterested

¹ Sculpture and garden, p. 116

and true.² The sculpture park however, does not uphold this pretense of autonomy. Instead it enables its viewers to see a multiplicity of interrelations between the sculpture and landscape, which are both heavily invested and reliant on one another.

While Rubinoff's sculptures initially circulated within the art market, the conception of the sculpture park in 19-- allowed him the opportunity to work independently of the commercial circuit. The artist was freed from the constraints of scale and material that were often imposed while displaying within the limited space of a gallery. He was also released from the market's obsessive need to constantly "value" artworks, and could concentrate solely on developing his aesthetic vision, uninhibited. The park and the works within reflect Rubinoff's self-conscious desire to resist the forces of the capitalist market economy, which circulates art works as transportable and exchangeable commodities. He began producing his works with the sole intention of displaying them in the park, and this new venue caused a profound change in his artistic practice as he moved increasingly towards site specificity. Sculptures were not produced in isolation of his studio, but developed through careful considerations of the landscape and environment in which they were to be placed. His sculptures were no longer transportable, placeless or nomadic. Instead they came to be deeply embedded in the materiality of the natural landscape. The space of art was not a blank slate, but a real place, where viewers could experience his works in the sensory immediacy of the spatial temporality of the park.

Rubinoff's sculptures have an inseparable relationship with their site, where meaning is not just located within the art object but extended to the contingencies of its context. The artist explains that shadows, natural lighting, negative spaces, colors and contours of the surrounding landscape are an essential part of experiencing the works. Movement of the viewer activates the sculptures, giving them a temporal quality. Take for example the sculpture in Fig. 1. While the photograph frames the sculpture against a static background, viewing this work first-hand in the sculpture park is a radically different and lively experience. Walking around the sculpture, the tensions within its folded

² Space, site, intervention, p. 40

compressed shapes are extremely palpable, further accentuated by the contours of the surrounding landscape. Yet the work does not appear rigid; instead the viewer can sense the dynamic interrelations of the various forces acting within and against the forms of the sculpture, necessary for maintaining the integrity of its shape. The viewer's movement activates within the sculpture a fluidity equivalent to that of the surrounding landscape. The sculpture's surface has also acquired a patina of colorations through exposure to fungi and other natural agents in the environment. As a result the sculpture takes on colors of the landscape, highlighting the aesthetic mutability of the works, which are in a constant process of transformation. The artist, unconcerned with controlling environmental effects, allows for a productive interchange between natural agents and the artworks which results in a close integration of the art and landscape. The sculptures therefore do not demand the sole attention of the viewer, but exist in harmony with the surrounding beauty of nature. It is however important to note, that although the art works are activated by the topography of the site, they also in turn accentuate and activate the landscape and are therefore integral to the spatial organization of the park.



Fig. 1 Jeffrey Rubinoff, Sculpture from Series 3, (year?)

The art and landscape form a symbiotic relationship, co-existing and complementing each other. The artwork is not framed in a fixed relation to its site, but in a process of constant transformation. The setting of the sculpture park allows for a fluidity of meanings and associations, rather than fixing things in standing-reserve. It offers a plurality of experiences for the viewer, with art and with nature, blurring boundaries and revealing the multiplicity of inter-dependencies with the surrounding environment.

