

The Jeffrey Rubinoff Sculpture Park

2013 Company of Ideas Forum on Art as a Source of Knowledge



*Knowledge is information that changes our perception.
Art can provide changes in perspective that change perception itself.
This transformation of perspective to perception is how art creates knowledge.*
—Jeffrey Rubinoff

ABOUT THE 2013 FORUM

Sculptor Jeffrey Rubinoff has argued that one of the most influential historical developments of the Age of Agriculture was the institutionalization of a warrior class.

Dr. Arther Ferrill, a military historian and expert on pre-historic war, explains that the early agricultural societies devoted significant resources to defense, and as civilizations emerged at the end of the Neolithic period, their political and military leadership usually overlapped.

According to Rubinoff, territorial security became a premise for the institutionalization of the warrior class, as well as an underlying assumption in the architecture of the political, civil, and religious institutions that arose to manage and perpetuate society. This assumption so permeates the 10,000-year history of agriculture and its institutions that we struggle to think beyond it; even after the assumption itself becomes absurd.

Dr. Lawrence Badash, professor emeritus of the history of science at the University of California, has outlined how, during the Cold War, American scientists theorized the widespread famine resulting from nuclear winter following a full-scale

nuclear war. Their updated models indicate that the effect may be triggered by even a limited nuclear exchange. Rationalizing leadership by the warrior class on the basis of a guarantee of security became absurd. In his 2010 Forum paper, Yale University cultural historian Dr. Jay Winter adds that during World War I the military castes of Europe essentially committed suicide while leading their formerly hegemonic empires to oblivion.

Rubinoff perceives that the failure of the underlying assumptions of the cultural institutions of agriculture is actually the End of the Age of Agriculture. He argues that our present inability to culturally evolve beyond this failure has spread a futureless pall over civilization, and even humanity itself. Rubinoff calls this 'nuclear winter of the mind.'

At the 2009 Company of Ideas Forum, art historian Jenni Pace Presnell presented compelling evidence of Rubinoff's perspective in the rise of pop art in the 1960's art world. In his Introduction to the 2012 Forum, Cambridge art historian Dr. James Fox explains that these changes in the art world were part of a larger cultural shift toward postmodern philosophy calling the very notion of meaning into question.



Series 4 - Piece 10







Series 6 - Xeno 2

Rubinoff argues that to escape this evolutionary cul-de-sac, natural history must be recognized as history. David Lawless, a graduate student in Biodiversity Conservation & Governance at Oxford University, points out that a range of behaviors commonly associated with cultural concepts such as morality are based on genetic components. In his 2013 Forum paper Lawless returns to a Darwinian notion of a sense of morality to provide a conceptual framework for this growing body of evidence. However, Rubinoff is careful to differentiate this sense of morality, or conscience as he puts it, from morality based on civil, political, or religious origins. He believes that conscience, sense of awe and the sacred, as well as art sense, all present in all known cultures, are influenced by clusters of genes.

As our understanding of our own 3.5 billion year natural history advances, the genetic factors in many human traits will come to be understood. If fundamental spiritual knowledge comes to be seen as having origins in our shared natural history, what

will be made of the historical civil, political and religious claims of authority over moral conventions?

As Rubinoff states: "Judgments made with the weight of individual conscience encourage the evolution of consciousness and reduce our divisive, atavistic dependence on mythological origins. We have learned in our recent history that there are times when individual conscience must overwhelm group moral certainty."

Rubinoff defines art as an "act of will in accord with a mature conscience," locating this natural moral sense at the center of artists' spiritual existence. Art communicates from this inborn center, through the entirety of that artist's learned knowledge.

Art can be a source of knowledge to those seeking a perspective from which to imagine a future.

— Karun Koernig, Curator

2013 FORUM SPEAKERS

Dr. Arther Ferrill is professor emeritus of history at the University of Washington at Seattle and a respected expert on Ancient Rome and military history. In addition to his book *The Origins of War* (1997 Westview Press), he has also written *Roman Imperial Grand Strategy*, and *The Emperor Caligula*. He is a regular contributor to *The Quarterly Journal of Military History* and other periodicals as an author and in review of other authors. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana in 1964.

David Lawless is pursuing an MSc in Biodiversity Conservation & Governance at the University of Oxford. His research focuses on evolution, integrative biology, and the management of protected areas. For the past four years, David has worked with Parks Canada as a naturalist and interpreter, using art and science as a way of connecting visitors to national parks. His additional interests include the history of science, evolutionary ethics and music.



Series 5 - Piece 13

For more information please visit www.rubinoffsculpturepark.org