



MODULE 5: SERIES 5-6

*Evolution, Metaphor, and the
Human Condition*

Series 5: Counterpoint as a Path to Human Consciousness

Introduction

- Shift from formal/structural evolution (Modules 3-4) into philosophical exploration
- Series 5-6: Sculptural form and composition as a metaphor for human consciousness and the moral condition
- Expansion of metaphor counterpoint from an aesthetic device to a framework for thought, awareness, and freedom



Series 5-11, 1988, Stainless 304 steel



Series 5 - Counterpoint as a Path to Individual Conscience

Counterpoint evolves from compositional technique into a metaphor for the importance of individual human awareness within our larger social existence.

Series 5 reminds us that Rubinoff's sculpture is not about form alone, but by means of metaphor can communicate a certain philosophical view.

Jeffrey thought that great art should help us mature our naturally evolved sense of awe, the sublime, the sacred and conscience. Series 5 is in a notably different register, evidently spirited and celebratory. It is the only series directly addressing the creative root of art, through **joy, celebration and play**



Series 5 - Counterpoint as a Path to Individual Conscience...cont'd

This sense of joy is achieved through the suggestion that each formal element as a paired counterpart somewhere else in the sculpture – your mind and eye then searches for the pairs

As well, the sculptures spring up from the ground on their cylindrical supports – usually in linear paths, but sometimes on angles, or taking curved paths – and then exploding with interest and complexity right at eye level.





Series 5 - Counterpoint as a Path to Individual Conscience...cont'd

The arrangement of the forms is lively, intricate and emanates light – all inviting closer investigation.

The multiple edges of the cylinders, spheres, and smaller cuboid forms gleam and emit light, rather than imply an indeterminate cloudy surface as in series 1 and 2

Steel as Metaphor

- The ingredients of music - notes on the staff - are mere analogs to sounds in your ear
- For sculpture, steel is the same: an analogue awaiting transformation
- Through the spark of metaphor, basic steel forms become art



Series 5-5, 1988, Stainless 304 steel



Music and the Liberation of the Arts

- Music broke free first, liberating itself from the single voice (Gregorian chant)
- Rubinoff sees this as the first art form that achieved abstraction by means of **polyphony** (multiple voices).
- Sculpture and painting lagged behind music in the move to abstraction. They were tied to paid commissions depicting analogues of important stories or people
- Modern abstraction in sculpture is like music's earlier liberation - an opening to multiple voices

The Sphere: A New Beginning

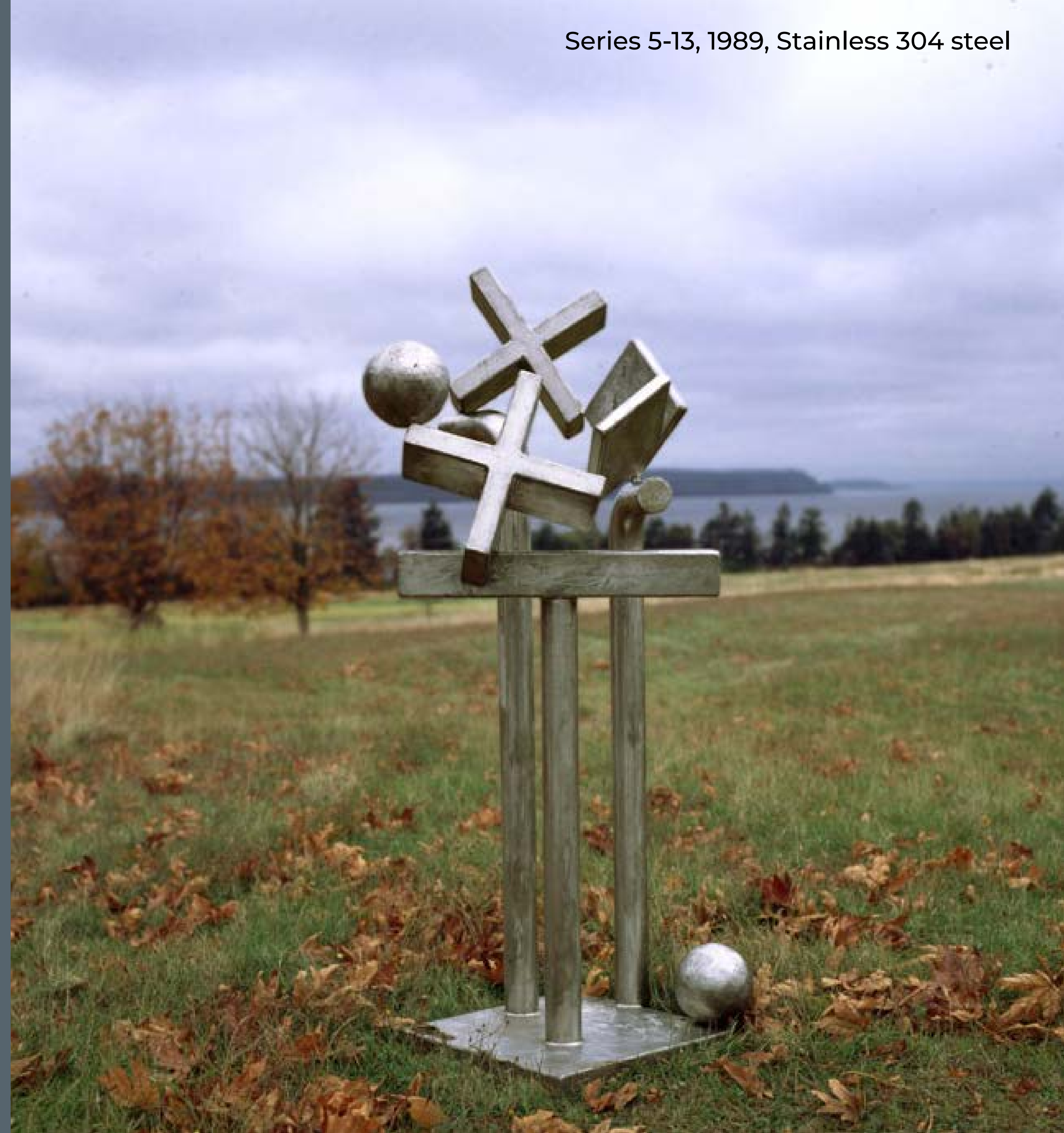
- First time incorporating a non-fabricated, cast form: the sphere
- It is a complete shape, and is difficult to integrate with other forms
- Rubloff made them hollow, distressed, and imperfect

The sculptures in Series 5 are composed around the sphere; it becomes the core of the counterpoint

Sculptures are composed in adult head-height, direct eye-level interaction

Series 5 : Joy, the Sacred, and Rising

- Unlike the intensity/anguish of Series 4, these works are celebratory
- The forms “spring forward,” and are bursting with liveliness - Rubinoff called these pieces his “little Brandenburg Concertos.”
- This series itself is a stark contrast to the preceding series 4 which was composed to Bach’s B Minor Mass.



For Rubinoff, the sacred is an ultimate value beyond the self, recognized and perceived through conscience.

Within Jeffrey's body of work, Series 5 introduces joy and celebration as a fundamental path to the sacred.



Pictured: Close-up of Series 5-5, 1988, Stainless 304 steel

Series 5-16, 1989, Stainless 304 steel



Core Values of Great Art

Jeffrey Rubino believed great art needed to have these values:

- Conscience - moral awareness and respect for the sacred
- The Sacred - recognition of ultimate worth
- Awe - wonder in the face of beauty
- The Sublime - experiences beyond ordinary comprehension

Series 5 emphasizes the sacred, conscience, and joy as nourishing forces for moral and personal growth.

Moral Maturation Through Art

- Aesthetically-charged spaces inspire people to better themselves and engage positively in the world.
- Art works through intuitive and emotional experiences rather than mental instructions.



Series 5-5, 1988, Stainless 304 steel

Moral Maturation Through Art

Rubinoff believed that humans are wired for conscience and to be empathetic (for example, mirror neurons), – positive aesthetic experiences can lift spirits, provide energy and inspiration.

The positive impact of an artful environment is most easily understood by imagining the emotional and spiritual impact of the counterfactual case – an environment of disorder and degradation.



Series 5-3, 1987, Stainless 304 steel



In this way, Series 5 offers a vision of art as a source of joy, nourishment, and moral uplift



Series 6: Inspired by Darwin and the Burgess Shale - Sculpture as Evolutionary Form

Darwin as a Guide for Creativity

- Rubinoff read Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1872 edition) and regarded it as a handbook for creativity in his studio
- Darwin's groundbreaking theory of restless, non-directed process of evolution mirrors the restless nature of artistic invention
- For Rubinoff, evolution shows that creation is both innocent and destructive, through adaption and natural selection it produces beauty and extinction alike

The Burgess Shale and the Explosion of Form

- Rubinoﬀ was inspired by the illustrations of fossils in Stephen Jay Gould's *Wonderful Life: The Burgess Shale and the Nature of History* (1989)
- The Burgess Shale fossils (5-600 million years old) revealed the sudden increase in the evolution of animal forms called the Cambrian Explosion:
 - A sudden proliferation of [body plans](#)
 - More original body plans created in 10-25 million years than in all of evolution combined
- Rubinoﬀ's sculpture series are an evolutionary metaphor: forms proliferate, experiment, and adapt as the art dictates.



Series 6 - Cassiopeia 8, 1991, A 242 Cor-ten

Exchange of Metaphors

Series 6 seeks an “exchange of metaphors” with natural history:

“What I wanted with this series is this exchange of metaphors with the Burgess Shale—an exchange that would extend art history 600 million years.”
– Jeffrey Rubinoff, 2011 Yale Forum Sculpture Tour for Yale Students



- By drawing inspiration from ancient life forms (e.g. *Marella Spendens*), Rubinfeld extends art history by 600 million years
- Sculpture becomes a bridge between natural history and human history



Series 6 - Shield of Marrella, 1996, A 242 Cor-ten



Close-Up



Fossil lectotype of Marrella, found in the Burgess Shale



Visual and Formal Qualities

Forms rise with buoyant, reed-like quality, echoing the upward lift of nature:

“What I wanted these pieces to have was that same sense that those redwing blackbirds have when they are sitting on top of a reed.”

– Jeffrey Rubinoff, 2011 Yale Forum Sculpture Tour for Cultural Historians

Works are prolific and diverse
- mirroring the variety and
unpredictability of life's evolution

Series 6 continues Rubinoff's
counterpoint: individual sculptural
voices are held in a polyphonic
relationship, never subsumed to a single
narrative



Values of Series 6

- Celebrates the creativity of evolution itself as a model for artistic invention
- Extends human self-understanding beyond cultural myths of divine origin to the deep time of natural history (evolution)
- Suggests art can evolve original knowledge, not simply mirror its culture of origin



Series 6-Andromeda 5, 1993, A 242 Cor-ten

Art as Witness Beyond Tribal or God-Driven Narratives

Rejecting Tribalism

- Tribalism refers to loyalty to one's own social group or "tribe," often having a strong dislike for any outside groups.
- Rubinoff saw **tribalism** as a *cultural pathogen*
- Historically intertwined with religion, nationalism, and racism, tribalism represents a retrogressive force that limits human progress.
- Reinforced through agriculture, warfare, and institutional power



Rejecting Tribalism...cont'd

Modern tribalism leads to genocide, wars, and for Rubinoff, it must be limited in the age of nuclear standoffs

Art can move us through a shared sense of the sacred, beyond the claims of tribalism, in order to speak to humanity as a whole

Series 6-Cassiopeia 6, 1990, A 242 Cor-ten



Beyond God-Driven Art

Artists have historically thought of their art as being God-driven

Rubinoff asks what if art touches the spiritual without being God-driven?



Beyond God-Driven Art...cont'd

Darwinian evolution provides an alternative model:

- Creativity rooted in the 'narrative' of life itself rather than divine command
- Extends art's timeline to 3.5 billion years of natural history



“This series is based on Darwin. Why I was interested in exploring Darwin, is that even up until my own time, artists have assumed that their work is God-driven.

But suppose you are doing work and suppose you are passing through all the passages that go with original art, and suppose you know that you are touching on something very spiritual very old, but suppose it is not God driven.

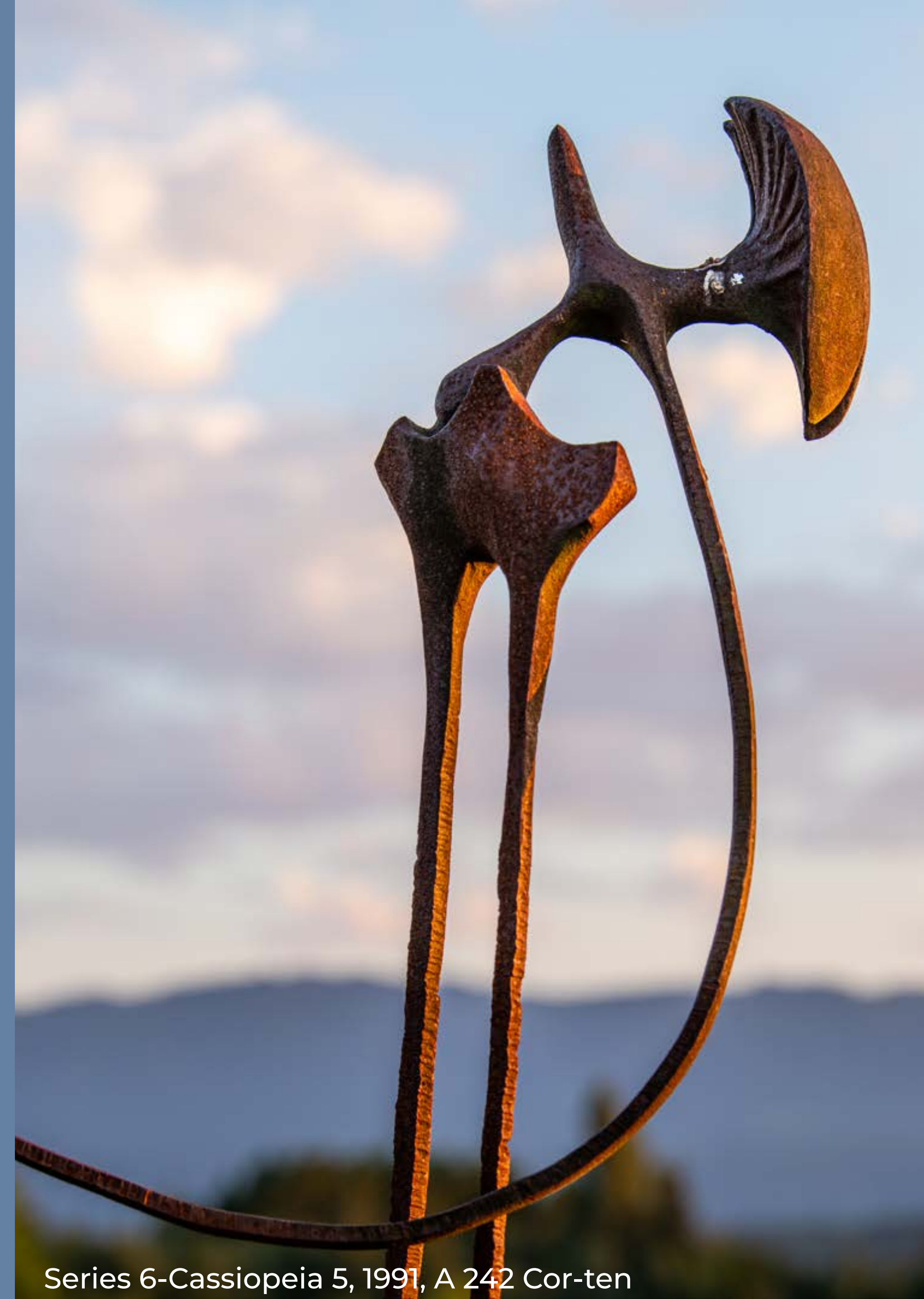
That is really the question. What are the alternatives for not being God driven?”

– Jeffrey Rubinoff, 2011 Yale Forum Sculpture Tour for Yale Students

Art as Secular-Spiritual Witness

- Humans are the only cognizant witnesses of life's unfolding
- With this awareness comes a great responsibility:
 - To recognize the value of life itself
 - To act as witnesses of art

“The act of will that I describe in my definition of art is the act of witnessing and recording this knowledge. This is the highest of human values—the recognition of the value of life itself.”
– Jeffrey Rubinoff, *Perspectives on Art As a Source of Knowledge* (2012)



Series 6-Cassiopeia 5, 1991, A 242 Cor-ten



Confronting History and Absurdity

- Rubinoff grew up during the Cold War, under the shadow of mutually assured destruction (MAD)
- He saw the absurdity of endless cycles of war that might culminate in the extinction of life itself
- For Rubinoff, art is an affirmation of life in the face of destruction – an act of will to record the human capacity to know and value life itself

Planetary Themes

Series 6 marks a shift from the personal to the planetary:

- From tribal or national identity to humanity within deep time
- From God-driven art to art as a moral witness to life itself



Art's ultimate role: inspire conscience and responsibility for the future of humanity

In Summary:

The artist as a witness carries secular responsibility to life itself, not a tribe or God



Series 5 explores counterpoint as joy, conscience, and the sacred

Series 5-13, 1989, Stainless 304 steel



Series 6 expands counterpoint into evolutionary form, modelling art after the diversity and creativity of life

Series 6-Heigir, 1995, A 242 Cor-ten