

# MODULE 6: SERIES 7-8

*Refinement, Resilience, and  
Anatomical Metaphor*



# Series 7: Sculptural Presence at Human Scale within a Vast Environment

## Refining Scale and Presence

- As with Series 6, Series 7 sees Rubinoff refining the relationship between biological metaphors within the sculpture and the surrounding natural environment
- However, this series is unique in its use of both corten and stainless steel
- With all of his smaller works, Rubinoff tests whether a piece can maintain human scale and presence within the vast, rugged landscape of the Park
- Each sculpture becomes a dialogue between the artist's will and the sheer force of nature



Series 7-Hunter 1, 1997, Stainless 304 & Cor-ten A 242 steel



## Testing Survival

- Rubinoff's process was to move each sculpture outdoors, photograph it, and evaluate if it owns its own:

“One of the strongest measures of a piece is whether or not it can survive in this environment. This environment is an incredibly sculpted environment... if a piece could stand on its own in this environment, then I felt like it was a strong enough piece on its own.”

— Jeffrey Rubinoff, *2014 Company of Ideas Forum*

- The Park becomes a testing ground: the sculpted environment of the park challenges the sculpture to rise to its level of artistry

This process refines his sense of visual endurance and sculptural resilience :

*“What I wanted from my work was to be able to say: ‘human beings can be here, but at a scale where they can live with this and live in counterpoint with it’.”*

— Jeffrey Rubinoff, 2015 Company of Ideas Forum





## From Complexity to Maturity

- Later works grew more complex even as they become smaller - requiring refinement rather than scale for power
- Rubinoff saw this as an advancement: creating presence without monumentality
- Complexity emerges through integration: form, environment, and human consciousness in counterpoint

“The real complexity comes in later works when they are very small in getting them to work in this entire environment. You have to advance to that level.”

— Jeffrey Rubinoff, *2011 Yale Forum Sculpture Tour for Cultural Historians*



Series 7-Hunter 1, 1997, Stainless 304 & Cor-ten A 242 steel



## Series 8: The Vertebrae Series: Anatomy Reimagined in Steel

### **Biological Inspiration**

- Series 8 draws directly from deer vertebrae (as many were found on the Park's nearly 200-acres of land) as well as an otter skull
- Rubinoﬀ reshapes these natural forms into engineered stainless steel, transforming bone structures into elegant, aerodynamic sculptures.
- Sculpted or architectural forms that resemble natural ones are called 'biomorphic'

## Living Architecture

These works celebrate the seamless transition between sinew and bone—the curves, tensions, and balances that make vertebrae functional.

Their stainless steel construction gives them tensile strength and flexibility; many subtly move with the wind.



## **Grace and Touch**

Compared to earlier, heavier series, these forms are soft-edged, intimate, and approachable.

Their smooth surfaces invite touch, and their curves feel almost anatomical in motion and gesture.



Series 8-4, 2002, Stainless 304 steel



## The Living Structure of Form

Series 8 represents the culmination of Rubinoﬀ's late-career exploration of form, structure, and organic inspiration.

Building on his previous work with Series 6 (Darwinian evolution) and Series 7 (human-scale presence in a vast environment), these sculptures translate biological structures into engineered steel that maintain aesthetic elegance and structural integrity

## The Living Structure of Form cont'd

Rubinoff describes these pieces as “totally sprung” - self-supporting, weather-resistant, and dynamically resonant with themes of evolution and resilience

“These are vertebrae; it is a vertebrae series. They are based on deer vertebrae, only redesigned for sculpture. Except that one, that one is based on an otter skull.”

— Jeffrey Rubinoff, *2011 Yale Forum Sculpture Tour for Cultural Historians*



Series 8-6, 2003, Stainless 304 steel

Series 8-1, 2000, Stainless 304 steel (based on otter skull).



## Anatomy as Metaphor

- This series draws on deer vertebrae and an otter skull as inspiration, reimagined in stainless steel
- Rubinoff transforms the internal structures of the body into a sculptural-musical language of tension, balance, and motion
- The engineering of each piece mirrors the function of muscle and bone:
  - distributes load
  - resists external forces
  - and maintains grace

**Result:** living architecture, where refinement, resilience, and anatomical metaphor intersect

## Refinement Through Engineering

By casting these mortal forms in stainless steel, Rubinoff celebrates the enduring artistry and elegance of nature.

Refinement of each piece reflects his mastery over material and form: Each vertebra is not just replicated, but redesigned for sculpture.

“All of these pieces are incredibly engineered to withstand the 60 mph storms here... the engineering of this is like muscle, it has to be able to distribute the load.”

— Jeffrey Rubinoff, *2011 Yale Forum Sculpture Tour for Cultural Historians*





Series 8-5, 2003, Stainless 304 steel

## Resilience: The Kinetic and the “Totally Sprung”

“They are beautifully engineered. You see they become kinetic in and of themselves... it is totally sprung. It just comes naturally to a totally sprung piece.”

— Jeffrey Rubinoff, *2011 Yale Forum Sculpture Tour for Cultural Historians*

- “Totally sprung” captures the sculptures’ dynamic equilibrium - alive with motion
- Evokes the resilience of living systems which bend and flex rather than break
- The concept of resilience is both literal and symbolic in this series: the sculptures survive environmental extremes while metaphorically affirming the endurance of life and creativity

## Bringing the Past Back Alive

“When we cross the line in geology—and bring back the fossil and we look at it and we bring it forward—we’re actually bringing the past back alive... maybe that’s part of the process of hope too.”

— Jeffrey Rubinoff, *2009 COI Forum Concluding Dialogue*

- These sculptures function as a bridge between the past and the present, connecting the Cambrian explosion and evolutionary history to contemporary art
- By sculpting vertebrae and skulls, Rubinoff transforms fossils into living presences
- Scientific and Spiritual gesture: Art as a hopeful continuation of evolution

Series 8-1, 2000, Stainless 304 steel



Series 8-7, 2004, Stainless 304 steel



## **Series 8 - Refinement, Resilience, and Hope**

The Vertebrae series embodies Rubinoff's resolution in his career:

**Refinement** - precision of design and finish

**Resilience** - endurance in form and philosophy

**Anatomical Metaphor** - life as structure and meaning

For Rubinoff, to sculpt is to affirm that life, like steel and bone, can be both vulnerable and unbreakable

# Series 9 - Resolution and Reflection in Composition

## A New Working Method

Since the early 1980s, Rubinoff composed his pieces digitally. He used computer-aided design to visualize each piece from all angles before fabrication.

Only when “art entered the piece” would he proceed; otherwise the digital model was deleted.

Series 9 marked a turning point, as Rhino 3D—the digital modelling software he used—enabled him to fully visualize the pieces before building them, including more detailed elements such as his signature swirly, hand-ground stainless-steel finishes.



## A Three-Series Arc

Series 9 completes an arc connecting Series 3 and 4:

Series 3: early structural inquiries



Series 3-3, 1983, A 242 Cor-ten steel

Series 4: dense, dramatic, unresolved interior spaces



Series 4-8, 1985, A 242 Cor-ten steel

Series 9: clarity, openness, and resolution



Series 9-7, 2016, Stainless 304 steel

In his later years, each piece took roughly a year to complete—reflecting a more deliberate, mature pace of creation.

## Resolving Earlier Tension

Series 4 was marked by internal conflict: heavy forms, hidden cavities, and emotional intensity.



Series 9 revisits this language but moves toward light and transparency.



Reflective stainless steel introduces openness where earlier works were enclosed.

## V-Arrangements, Light and Spatial Openness

- Where Series 4 uses curved T-sections, Series 9 shifts the T-Section in open and spacious V-arrangements.
- These create rhythmic upward movements and allow light to enter and pass through the sculpture
- Part of the power of Series 9 is a glistening finish. Rubinoff gave no instructions on their care so they are maintained in the state he left them and cleaned annually.



Series 9-1, 2010, Stainless 304 steel



The final works in the series—large, hovering V-shaped structures—are among Rubinoff's most confident and open.

Series 9 emphasizes transparency: you can see into and through the works.

This openness reflects Rubinoff's belief that the artist must reach internal resolution before the artwork can be complete.