

# Jeffrey Rubinoff Sculptures 1983-85



*Tofino #1* 1985 Cor-ten plate Height 7'3"

The Nathan Manilow Sculpture Park  
Governors State University, University Park, Illinois  
Opening September 27, 1985

A Privately Funded Supplement



# The Nathan Manilow Sculpture Park

The Nathan Manilow Sculpture Park is located on the campus of Governors State University in University Park, Illinois, thirty-five miles south of the Chicago Loop. Covering some three hundred acres, the Park has drawn national and international attention for the beauty of its prairie setting and its success as a siting for sculpture.

The Park is the direct result of the generosity and vision of one man, Lewis Manilow, Chicago art collector and former Chairman of the Board of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago. In the late 1960s Manilow began development of University Park (then called Park Forest South), a federally subsidized 'New Town.' Plans for the development included a sculpture park to be administered by the Park Forest South Cultural Foundation. With funds from the National Endowment for the Arts, Mark di Suvero was commissioned to fabricate sculptures for the park in 1968 and 1969. The following year, with a NEA grant matching the value of di Suvero's *For Lady Day* gifted by Manilow to the Cultural Foundation, sculptures were commissioned from John Chamberlain, Jerry Peart and Charles Ginnever.

In 1969 Governors State University was founded with University Park selected as its site, and Dr. William E. Engbretson its founding president. Manilow and Engbretson began working together on siting sculptures on the campus; Manilow gifting Edvins Strautmanis' *Phoenix* and Engbretson winning an NEA grant to commission a work by John Henry. When the original plans for a sculpture park at Park Forest South were postponed in the early 1970s, Manilow offered the sculptures already commissioned for siting on the campus. The development of the University property as a setting for major sculpture was affirmed in 1976 by Engbretson's support of a sculpture exhibition that opened in August that year. Entitled *The Sculptor, the Campus and the Prairie*, the exhibition gained substantial critical acclaim,

and was described by Alan Artner in the *Chicago Tribune* as "a virtual model for all public art projects."

With Engbretson leaving the university in 1976 and state funds being unavailable, development of the sculpture collection stalled. However in 1978 a parcel of land, donated some years before to the university by six individuals including Lewis Manilow, was sold. Terms of the gift stipulated that proceeds from the sale were to be used "to honor the name of Nathan Manilow in the cultural arts." Nathan Manilow, Lewis' father, was one of the developers of Park Forest South. With the enthusiastic support of the University's new President, Dr. Leo Goodman-Malamuth, the sculpture exhibition on campus was renamed "The Nathan Manilow Sculpture Park" and the University Foundation assumed responsibility for the park's maintenance and for developing the collection.

Over the following six years, with funds from the land sale, matching funds from the NEA and donations, the collection grew to include Mary Miss' *Field Rotation*, Richard Hunt's *Large Planar Hybrid*, Jene Highstein's *Flying Saucer*, Martin Puryear's *Bodark Arc*, John Chamberlain's *A Virgin Smile*, untitled works by Terry Karpowicz and Joel Shapiro and Bruce Nauman's *House Divided*. In 1985 the Park Forest South Cultural Foundation granted title to the University Foundation of the works it had originally commissioned, bringing the collection to twenty-one works.

The current exhibition of eight sculptures by Jeffrey Rubino marks a new venture for the Nathan Manilow Sculpture Park in holding a major one-person exhibition. We welcome this opportunity to extend the range of our support for major contemporary sculpture.

William H. Dodd  
Chief Executive Officer  
Governors State University Foundation

# Introduction

In concluding her major study *Passages in Modern Sculpture* Rosalind Krauss declares that by "images of passage, the transformation of sculpture—from a static, idealized medium to a temporal and material one—that had begun with Rodin is fully achieved."<sup>1</sup> She shows how modern sculpture, by radical transformations in both its theoretical and psychological aspects, has broken the normative (opaque and objective) distance between viewer and object to assert a relationship critically open and subjective. The presumption of sculpture as representing a core of material analogous to human "innerness" has been set aside.

By her approach to essential transformations within sculptural meaning and materiality, Krauss' critical perspective opens into the complexity that marks the work of any major artist. Her discussion of David Smith's work is pivotal and exemplary: pivotal in revealing how the range of creativity in his work has opened so many critical paths; exemplary in facing the essential character of his sculptural expression, rather than tracking the sequence of formal developments.

The sculptures in this exhibition, the major part of Jeffrey Rubinoff's output between 1983 and 1985, respond to the example of Smith, in particular to Smith's major statements of sculpture in relation to human scale. By this Rubinoff has taken a particular interpretation towards the critical complex arising from Smith's work; an interpretation responsive to the tradition of figurative sculpture. Rubinoff's approach is specifically rejective of the pictorial and architectural abstractions marked in so much recent sculpture. His sculptural concerns can be described as conservative, not in terms of a regressive repetition, but in rejecting those stylistic formulations that have equated sculpture with the aesthetics of painting, or have placed sculpture as addenda to architecture. It is conservative in the sense of reaffirming sculpture as an independent formal means to realize images—

now unidealized, "temporal and material"—that engage individual self-reflection within a communal, a social perspective.

The sculptures *Quadra #1* and *Quadra #2*<sup>2</sup> that Rubinoff made in 1983 were, in structure, technique and image, transitional in setting the directions his work has subsequently described. The terms of his work are rigorous, conceptually and formally, and demanding because of his determination to fabricate all the work himself. The basic formal and structural element from which he has worked is fabricated from eight foot sections of steel plate.<sup>3</sup> This element is a T section articulated by triangular wedges welded at regular intervals along its length. Its simple geometry (with its reference to a basic industrial form) opens multiple possibilities in visual and structural terms. The two planes at right angles and the wedges between them contain and imply all the spatial planes between the horizontal and the perpendicular. Without compromising the rigid geometry of these welded sections, their disposition defining the volume of the sculpture by their planes, edges and points describe fully three-dimensional forms. Further, the triangular wedges, integral to the structure of the basic element, introduce a complex range of detailing both by their shapes and by the shadows they cast across and through the larger planar surfaces.

This basic and simple geometry of the structural elements responds to the spatial volumes of the sculptures; the disposition of the elements form sculptures that are contained within and define a cubic space. From whichever position the sculptures are viewed, the linear directions, the angles, points and planes are definitions of planes or points within this virtual space. In this respect Rubinoff's work refers to the long tradition of carved sculpture, the sense of sculptural form being revealed from the density of a block of material, whether stone or wood. But in his choice of material, in the sense of form accumu-

lated by its fabrication from steel, Rubinoff's work critically reflects on the developments of modern sculpture that, in denying a core of material, radically displaces the viewer from identity with a center.

This critical reflection arises from the tensions between recognition of a sculpture's containment within a regular spatial block and the structure's denial of a core. It is a denial manifested in the complexity by which a work's three-dimensionality is described, a complexity arising both from radical disjunctures and from the subtleties of detail. These tensions are emphasized by the contrasts between open, angled planes or faces of steel and the T section elements. But the open planes themselves, in their structure of right angled planes and intervening triangular elements, appear as attenuations and reformulations of the basic T section elements; polygonal in *Texada #1*, curved in *Lesquiti #1* and the two combined in the *Tofino* sculptures.

It is in the formal and structural responses between the disparate elements that the existence of a center (a core with front and rear and side views) is suggested and by those same elements denied. This conflict is heightened within the development of the series by the changes in the dynamics of the sculptures. The earlier works of the group are based on a T section element placed flat to the ground. In *Lesquiti #2*, and subsequent works, the principal structural formation has the T sections angled upwards so that contact with the ground is only at points. The upward thrusts of these elements thus both support and contrast with the planar elements. This effect is most strongly pronounced in *Tofino #2* and *Tofino #3*, and leads to a greater openness between all the elements. There is almost a sense of an organic unfolding, nascent in *Lesquiti #2*, becoming explicit in the most recent sculptures.

In terms of the relationship to a spatial block, in the sense of emergent forms and the formal integrity arising from the echoing of views—front and rear, left side, right side—Rubinoff's

work responds to the traditional center of sculpture, the independent figurative form. It responds also to a traditional notion of sculptural process in the sense of the artist working directly with a single, basic rigid material. But it inverts the traditional process of subtraction by the additive means of cutting, bending and welding, relating to the process of modern sculpture both in its materials and its reflection of industrial processes. But in this conjunction, and in the formal structuring of the works and in their scale, Rubinoff's work reflects on a sense of loss. The material, its weight and structuring stands in reference to a society whose core, economically, socially and in terms of power has revolved around heavy industry. It is a core, however, in the process of displacement. Rubinoff, in rejecting the developments of sculpture that have set sculpture to the edges of pictorial aesthetics or in subordination to architecture, is seeking a return to the definitions of sculpture's mediate relationship between the individual and society. It is a relationship that his work expresses not so much as decentered (privileging individual sensibility) than as discentered, seeking to stand out against its own collapse.

David Burnett  
Toronto, July 1985

## Notes

1. Rosalind Krauss *Passages in Modern Sculpture*. Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1981. pp. 282-283.
2. Not in exhibition. The titles of these sculptures and those in the exhibition refer to islands or small towns off the British Columbia mainland.
3. *Quadra #1* and *Quadra #2* were made with  $\frac{1}{2}$ " and  $\frac{3}{4}$ " A242 (weathering steel) plate. With *Texada #1* he combined  $\frac{1}{2}$ " A242 plate and  $\frac{3}{4}$ " Cor-ten plate; subsequent sculptures all fabricated from  $\frac{3}{4}$ " and 1" Cor-ten plate.





*Texada #1* 1983 A242 (weathering steel) plate & Cor-ten plate Height 7'





*Texada #2* 1983-4 Cor-ten plate Height 7' 6"





*Lesquiti #1* 1984 Cor-ten plate Height 6'





*Lesquiti #2* 1984 Cor-ten plate Height 6'6"





*Lesquiti #3* 1984 Cor-ten plate Height 9'6"





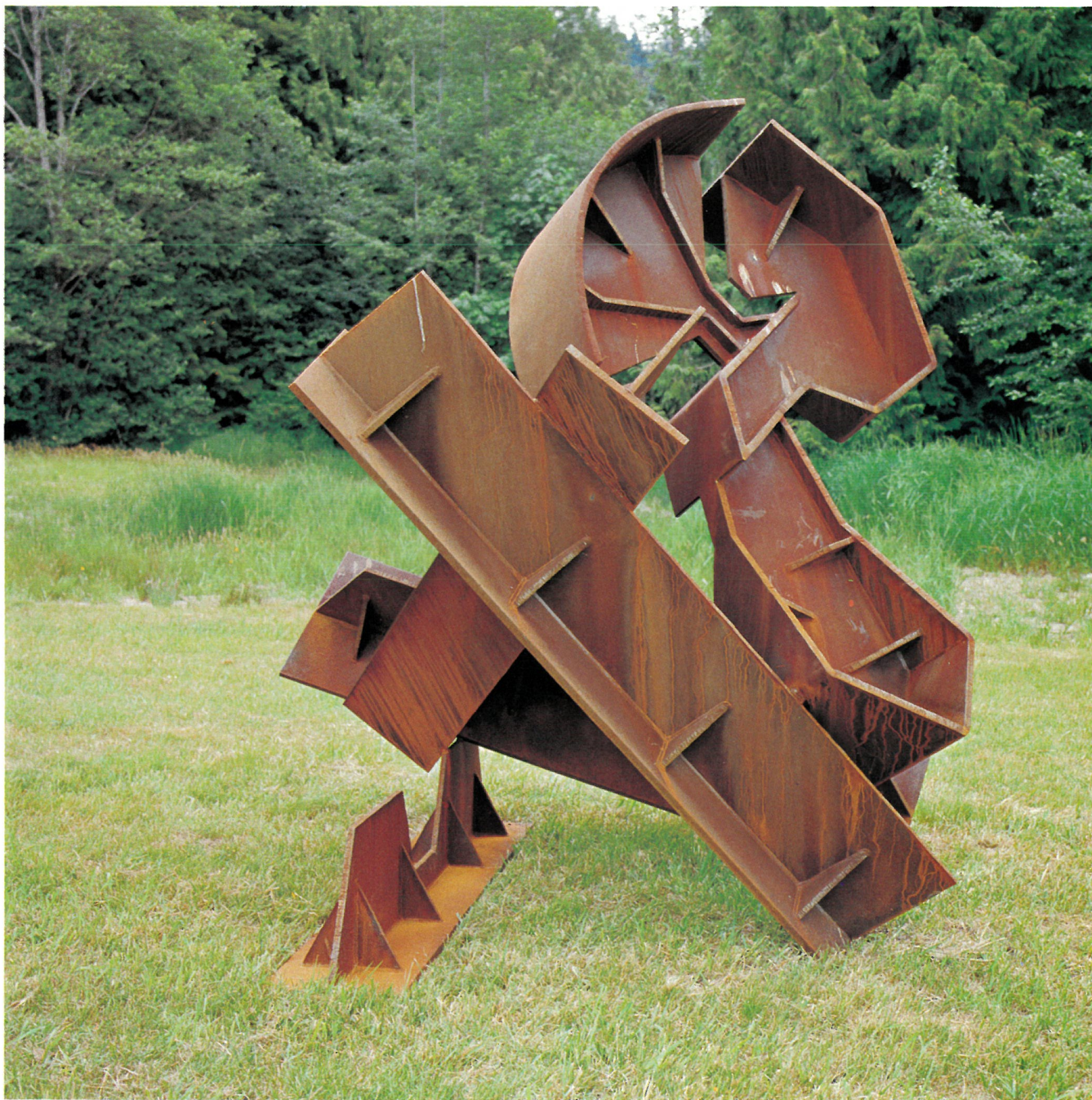
*Tofino #1* 1985 (second view) Cor-ten plate Height 7'3"





Tofino #1 1985 (third view)





*Tofino #2* 1985 Cor-ten plate Height 7'3"





Tofino #2 1985 (second view)





*Tofino #3* 1985 Cor-ten plate Height 7'6"





*Tofino #3* 1985 (second view)



**Jeffrey Rubinoff** was born in London, Canada in 1945. He obtained his BA in 1966 and MFA in 1969. Working as a building developer after his graduation, he was responsible for the total design and development of White Oaks Mall in London, Canada from 1971–73. In addition to the design of the building and landscape areas and the supervision of the development of the mall, he designed and fabricated a major sculpture as a focal center for the site. In 1974 he moved to Hornby Island off Canada's west coast to devote himself exclusively to sculpture-making. He exhibited with the Marlborough Gallery, New York in 1984. He continues to live and work on Hornby Island, British Columbia.

*Design:* David Shaw & Associates Ltd., Toronto  
*Color Separations:* Herzig Somerville Limited, Toronto



# Art in America

An aerial photograph of a public plaza. In the center is a circular pool of water. To the left of the pool is a large, dark, curved sculpture that looks like a tilted arc. The plaza is paved with a pattern of light and dark stones. Many people are sitting on the edge of the pool and walking around. In the background, there are cars parked on a street and some trees.

September 1985 \$4.75

"Tilted Arc" Controversy / Artworld Cassandras / Kandinsky in Paris  
Audubon and His Legacy / The Esthetics of "Precious"