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ARTS

From Science to Sculpting

Barton Rubenstein's artwork can be seen in the area and across the nation.

By **Kate Oczypok** October 17, 2010

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Growing up, Barton Rubenstein always loved art. His mother, who passed away when he was a teen, was a curator at the Smithsonian. But art wasn't his first calling.

"As someone who loves math and science, I wanted to originally work as a scientist somewhere like the National Institutes of Health," he said.

Rubenstein, who grew up in Northwest D.C., received his Ph.D in visual brain research from the Weizmann Institute in Israel.

When he came back from Israel in 1994, Rubenstein had a postdoctoral appointment waiting for him at the NIH in the functional MRI laboratory.

"I'd been thinking about sculpture for a few years and missing the 'making things' part of my life," he said. "At that point in time, I was thoroughly enjoying scientific research and all of the academics, but making things had always been an important part of my life growing up."

Rubenstein chose to take a sabbatical year from research and make sculpture. He made seven water and kinetic sculptures during that year and never looked back.

"I missed making things with my hands and that's why I decided to move from science to art," said Rubenstein, who minored in art.

Rubenstein and his mother spent a lot of time at the dinner table talking about the aesthetics and beauty of art and how to define it and what it meant.

"I was always exposed to art yet I never thought I'd be a professional artist," Rubenstein said.

Now, Rubenstein has 50 public art projects around the country and internationally, including a sculpture at [Somerset Elementary School](http://chevychase.patch.com/listings/somerset-elementary-school-2) (<http://chevychase.patch.com/listings/somerset-elementary-school-2>) in Chevy Chase. He has a large amount of pieces in the D.C. area as well as art in California, Utah, Arizona, Ohio and others.

Sculptor Rubenstein loves to make things more beautiful for the next generation. With a sculpture at Somerset Elementary, it's not hard to see the positive energy that resonates from his creation.

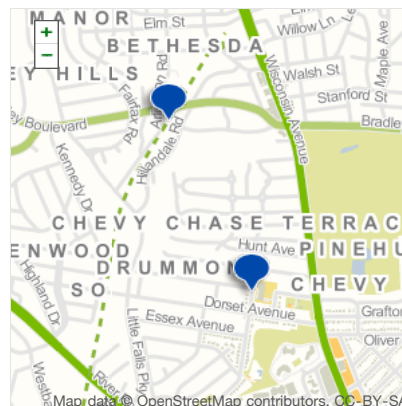
"Placing sculpture at academic institutions is my favorite venue," Rubenstein said. "This is the place where people and students can be inspired and motivated to make their dreams come true."

Rubenstein lives blocks away from the school along with his wife and three children, including one who attends Somerset Elementary.

Rubenstein's sculpture at the school is called "Field of Dreams." It is the first elementary school where Rubenstein's work is displayed. The sculpture symbolizes seeds floating on edges of grass blades waiting to germinate.

"It's called Field of Dreams so as not to be too literal, allowing the sculpture to be interpreted in your own way," Rubenstein said.

There is also a Rubenstein sculpture at the Friendship Heights Village Center. On loan, the piece, called "Topspin," relates to Rubenstein's love of tennis. "The topspin is basically something that happens in tennis, when you hit the ball it spins and projects a surge of energy," Rubenstein said.



PHOTOS (3)



Rubenstein, who spent time in Maine and Canada, enjoys the wilderness. Combined with his relentless energy, he recently took his wife and family on a trip around the country. Spending half their time in a tent and the other half in the homes of relatives and hotels, Rubenstein said it was one of the greatest educational experiences he ever gave his children.

"They're in a great school system but in the end this type of trip trumps them all," he said. "You meet people, take in beautiful natural wonders---it's priceless in many ways."

The Rubensteins also kept a travel blog, which later inspired friends to take on similar types of ventures with their own families.

When the Rubensteins aren't traveling, they enjoy the many activities Chevy Chase has to offer, including biking the [Capital Crescent Trail](http://chevychase.patch.com/listings/capital-crescent-trail) (<http://chevychase.patch.com/listings/capital-crescent-trail>), seeing museums and the like. "I grew up going to a lot of theater, although I haven't gone as much recently as a parent," Rubenstein said. "I always say, I have enough drama in my house."

Rubenstein's best advice to those interested in furthering a career is to have a diversity of interests and knowledge in many fields. "That way, you will be able to create a unique product and have the opportunity to connect with potential clients in a variety of ways," he said.

Rubenstein currently works at [his studio](http://www.rubensteinstudios.com/) (<http://www.rubensteinstudios.com/>) on Dorset Ave.



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