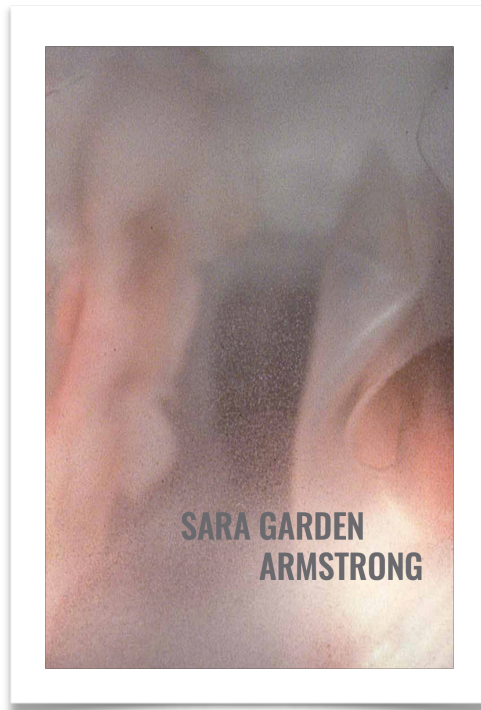




**“Book Review: *Sara Garden Armstrong: Threads and Layers*”**

Reviewed by Tucker Lieberman



**A gloriously illustrated retrospective on a groundbreaking multimedia art career**

*Sara Garden Armstrong: Threads and Layers* showcases this American artist’s visual work, presenting it in the context of her life and career. The artist provided guidance and input for this multi-authored, collaborative book.



Born in Alabama in 1943, Armstrong spent much of her career in New York. She is known for her sculpture, drawings, paintings, books created as art objects, and experiments with sound and light, all of which lead the viewer to re-experience space. “The viewer/participant moves through a space, inside a space, becomes a part of the space,” she wrote in the catalogue for a 1981 exhibition.

The generous number of color illustrations are a joy of this art book. Where the original artwork was three-dimensional, the photographs themselves were taken artistically with careful attention to lighting and space. The book is not only an index of Armstrong’s art but a walkthrough of the workspaces in which she created it and the museums in which she exhibited it.

In Armstrong’s work, colors are often muted, lines are often smudged, and yet they draw the eye and fascinate. There is usually luminosity, texture, or both, as in her 2018 work “Genesis I,” made of copper and leaf fiber with light shining through.

The art’s meaning is affected by the personal attention the viewer brings to it. “What we see in the morning may be very different from what we experience in the afternoon,” Armstrong told an interviewer in 2014.

There’s a Foreword by David Ebony, an Introduction by Gail C. Andrews, and a 22-page chronology, tracing her life from her birth through her 75<sup>th</sup> birthday, compiled by Steffany Martz.

Armstrong’s art reflects a sensitivity to nature. In her late 1990s *Littorals*, as Ebony explains in the Foreword, she created “a handmade time-lapse representation of ocean waves lapping at the beach” by photographing “shorelines on either side of the Atlantic Ocean” in France and New York and then drawing from the photographs.

She has also been influenced by machinery. Andrews shares in the Introduction that Armstrong enjoyed visiting her father’s construction sites as a child.



Science is also an important prompt. In 2014, she was commissioned to represent how multiple sclerosis affects the human body on the cellular level. She made a “large hanging sculpture to suggest nerve impulses. When the light stops, it refers to the damage that MS causes to nerves and specific brain cells.”

You don't have to be a student or scholar of art to appreciate this book. Through its focus on one artist, it gives a wealth of entry points for you to begin to appreciate modern art or to deepen your existing appreciation. It teaches how art not only gives us sensory experiences but also points us toward interrogating and interpreting those experiences. It is a retrospective on one person's career and also an example of the many exciting directions in which an artist can go.