

GALLERY GUIDE

GEORGE ARMSTRONG
JANUARY 17 - APRIL 12, 2025

Intricate. Intimate. A love letter from one artist to another—from a son to his father. Curated by Zachary Armstrong, the exhibition celebrates the life and work of George Armstrong, a long time sculpture and ceramics teacher at Fairborn High School whose creativity inspired a generation of artists.

Zachary Armstrong grew up surrounded by art. His father would bring home supplies from school and encourage Zachary and his brother to draw every night. "Drawing was very much a part of living at home," Zachary reflects. "I wanted nothing more than to make a life of it, but that is like saying at nine that you want to be an astronaut. It felt both incredibly close and completely out of my reach."

Zachary's dream eventually materialized, and his practice has become an ongoing narrative, driven by material curiosity and deeply anchored in personal mythology. From incorporating his mother's

childhood drawings to crafting wooden armatures that echo his father's ceramic silhouettes, his work is rooted in the people and moments that shaped his life.

For this exhibition, Zachary secretly gathered drawings, paintings, sculptures, and ceramics from his father's home—artifacts of a life devoted to creativity and collaboration. These works not only reflect George's work but also the profound influence he had on his sons, who grew up to become artists in their own right.

For The Contemporary Dayton, this exhibition is especially poignant. Zachary created the inaugural exhibition for The Co's new space in 2021—a site-specific installation inspired by the history and influence of The Co on himself and the artistic landscape of Dayton. We're honored to present this intimate portrait of a father's enduring influence and a son's heartfelt tribute.

Beyond his family, George inspired generations of students, many of whom continue to create work today. We asked two of them to contribute their thoughts about how George inspired them.

It is said that we are given three great teachers in life. If luck has it, at least one of them can be a good person and not a lesson. George was one of mine. He was my ceramic and sculpture teacher through high school along with some great friends and makers who still hold that rank today. In retrospect, we all describe his teaching method as very hands-off. There isn't much instruction or plan and definitely no coddling. If you were interested you paid attention, and if you weren't you most likely fucked off. He was there for you if you showed pursuit and a willingness to try. Most importantly we paid mind that every day he was in constant production, along with constant play and experimentation. We learned by watching which allowed us to be motivated and taught by the act of making itself, which in turn showed us we could be our own teacher through repetitive failure until achievement, which is also the greatest reflection of life. It is just as beautiful as it is brutal and he wasn't scared to show you.

—Shon Walters artist, educator, lyricist, and percussionist; Dayton, Ohio

I remember walking into George's studio when I was a kid. I say "studio" because it wasn't really a high school classroom; it was a real, working art space. The sounds, the smells, the textures—everything was so organic, like a garden with George as the gardener. He taught through example and experience, not just tricks and techniques, though he knew a few. He made school bearable, even possible for me. I became a studio artist in that space because of him. I've never looked back.

—Justin Teilhet artist; Yellow Springs, Ohio

GEORGE ARMSTRONG

George Armstrong has been actively working as an artist and teacher for over 50 years. He received his Bachelor's and Master of Arts degrees in Art Education from Wright State University, and he taught ceramics at Fairborn High School and Stivers School for the Arts. His ceramics are both sculptural and functional, using heavily textured stoneware and raku clay coupled with metal, wood, and found objects. They are finished with hand-mixed glazes and stains and are fired multiple times. His artwork uses themes from his environment, history, and travels while letting the viewer see, read, and imagine their own perspective of each piece. George lives in Kettering, Ohio with his beloved dog. He designed and built his home and created his own ceramics studio where he spends as much time as possible working on his art.



George Armstrong, (contributed)

ZACHARY ARMSTRONG

Zachary Armstrong was born in Dayton, Ohio. His work encompasses painting, sculpture, and large installations. It is based on personal storytelling, rooted deep in his childhood, his family, and the American vernacular, as well as nature, art history, and literature. Armstrong often makes direct reference to popular culture, including the names of local stores or the names of friends and family members. Images can derive from children's drawings, his own and his family's, transformed into large-scale works, motifs repeated throughout several series of paintings and sculptures. Armstrong has had solo exhibitions in Beijing, London, Berlin, Paris, Copenhagen, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and New York, and he is represented by the Tilton Gallery. His first one-person show was at the Dayton Visual Arts Center in 2014. He has been included in group shows in Columbus, New York, Easthampton, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Berlin.

As a kid, drawing was just as important in our home as eating dinner and remembering to brush your teeth. It was a part of daily life. My father, George Armstrong, is a very unique artist because everything he does is "art." Whether he is sculpting with clay, changing a leaky faucet, building a house, or even going on trips to the dog park, all of this is part of his life as an artist. He frequents Deeds Point Dog Park in Dayton, which is filled with one-of-a-kind Adirondack chairs that he builds and drops off there, many of which are decorated with paintings of dogs who have frequented the park throughout the years. And I'm so thankful and lucky that he has taught me that anything can be art, depending on how you do it and how you think about it. These lessons have shaped and saved my life. I remember a time during my early 20s when I was putting a bathroom in a neighbor's house, which was not what I wanted to be doing. He told me that the whole bathroom was a sculpture: a piece of trim here, a tile there, all specific pieces to make a whole and unique work or environment. I've never lost that way of thinking. He taught and made quite a few great artists that I know of during his 50-plus years as an educator in the arts. Chances are if you've had a great art teacher, or have known a good artist in the Dayton area, my dad has had some influence on them. Even if they don't know it, a butterfly effect if you will.

—Zachary



The Contemporary Dayton, Zachary Armstrong: Grids and Abstracts, Apr 30–July 18, 2021

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