



# The Sculpture of Ruth Asawa: Contours in the Air

*Elisa Urbanelli*

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The scope and stature of Ruth Asawa's work are brought into brilliant focus in this superb book, created to accompany the first complete retrospective of the artist's career. Beginning with her earliest works—drawings and paintings created in the 1940s while studying at Black Mountain College—this beautifully illustrated volume traces Asawa's trajectory as a pioneering modernist sculptor who is recognized nationally for her wire sculpture, public commissions, and activism in education and the arts. *The Sculpture of Ruth Asawa* establishes the importance of Asawa's work within the larger national context of artists who redefined art as a way of thinking and acting in the world rather than as merely a stylistic practice. A chronology and a collection of essays by noted scholars highlight Asawa's complex relationship to American art and Asian American history and provide engrossing biographical information.

In her lifelong experimentations with wire, especially its capacity to balance open and closed forms, Asawa invented a powerful new vocabulary. Committed to enhancing the quality of daily life through art produced within the home, she contributed a unique perspective to the formal explorations of twentieth-century abstract sculpture. Working in a variety of non-traditional media, Asawa performed a series of uncanny metamorphoses, leading viewers into a deeper awareness of natural forms by revealing their structural properties. Through her artistic practice, Asawa reconnects with the Buddhist ethos of her parents, transforming the commonplace into metaphors for life processes themselves.

*Essays by Daniell Cornell, Emily Doman, Mary Emma Harris, Karin Higa, Jacqueline Hoefler, John Kriedler, Susan Stauter, and Sally Woodbridge*  
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