



Sheila Hicks: Weaving as Metaphor

JULY 12 – OCTOBER 15, 2006

The Bard Graduate Center for Studies in the
Decorative Arts, Design, and Culture

"I found my voice and my footing in my small work. It enabled me to build bridges between art, design, architecture, and decorative arts."

—Sheila Hicks

Sheila Hicks: Weaving as Metaphor, the BGC's first exhibition devoted to a contemporary artist, examines the small woven and wrought works that Hicks has produced for 50 years. With their distinctive colors, experimental and natural materials, and personal narratives, these intriguing weavings reveal the emergence and continuity of the artist's inventive approach to textile media, and a unique connection between the artistic and design aspects of textiles.

The small woven forms are an essential means of creative expression for the artist. In addition, they provide a format for mastering approaches to materials and techniques that she then frequently applies to works of differing scales, including monumental site-specific commissions for public spaces and handwoven and industrially produced fabrics. Using a portable frame loom of her own design, Hicks employs a remarkably broad range of materials, such as cotton, wool, linen, silk, goat hair, alpaca, paper, leather, stainless steel, and found objects. These woven works, of considerable beauty and intricate detail, document and reveal Hicks's artistic and personal journeys; they are simultaneously essays in design, intimate recollections, aesthetic forays, and tactile metaphors for language and human connection.

The Bard Graduate Center exhibition provides a unique opportunity to examine the ways in which Hicks's conceptual and technical ideas resonate in the small format. They evoke the persistent necessity and meaning of creating and designing with textiles by hand. In today's global world, increasingly dominated by technology, such an approach remains essential to the design process even as it disappears. Nina Stritzler-Levine, director of exhibitions at the Bard Graduate Center, is curator of the exhibition.

BACKGROUND

Sheila Hicks was born in Hastings, Nebraska, in 1934. She received B.F.A. (1957) and M.F.A. (1959) degrees from Yale University, where she studied with Bauhaus instructor Josef Albers, Swiss photographer Herbert Matter, and art and architecture historian George Kubler, among others. In 1957–58 Hicks

LEFT **The Portuguese Synagogue**
Made in Amsterdam and Paris, 1987
Cotton, linen, silk, and wool, 9" h x 4" w
Collection of the artist

RIGHT **Muñeca (Doll)**
Made in Chile, 1957
Wool, 11.75" h x 4.75" w
Collection of Itaka Schlubach



traveled on a Fulbright painting scholarship through Venezuela, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, and Chile. Since 1964 she has lived in Paris and maintained her studio there. One of Hicks's earliest and most important commissions was a pair of tapestry bas-reliefs for the Ford Foundation in 1966. In 1967 she participated in the Lausanne Biennale and contributed substantially to revolutionizing and redefining tapestry art, moving it off the wall and into space. Her inclusion in the *Wall Hangings* exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in 1969 solidified her recognition as a leading figure in textile art. Today Hicks is sought by architects and other patrons to execute "woven walls" that bring a human element to government and corporate offices. Among her recent commissions are two bas-reliefs for the U.S. Courthouse in Foley Square and a monumental hanging for the Target corporate headquarters in Minneapolis.

EXHIBITION

Sheila Hicks: Weaving as Metaphor consists of approximately 150 works from private and public collections in this country and abroad. The exhibition is arranged both chronologically and thematically to reveal the metaphorical and personal narratives, the diverse geographical areas where the weavings were made, and the artist's specific material and technical concerns. Beginning with Hicks's early years in Chile and Mexico, the exhibition presents her initial experiments with the small format, using mainly cotton and wool and pre-Columbian structures. This section includes the "hieroglyph" works that were acquired by the Museum of Modern Art, her first institutional patron. After moving to Paris, she introduced so-called *objets trouvés* and fabricated whimsical commentaries about her professional and family life. The show continues by evoking the rich cultural diversity Hicks embraces in her work, using materials found or created in locations such as India, the Brittany coast, Morocco, Japan, and South Africa. The exhibition also considers the artist's fascinating technological innovations. Her stainless-steel, fiber-slit tapestries, for example, emphasize the material's aesthetic potential and its strength and immutability. The exhibition also includes the artist's notebooks, drawings, photographs, and handmade loom.

CATALOGUE

Published by the Bard Graduate Center in conjunction with Yale University Press, the catalogue includes three essays: Arthur C. Danto, Emeritus Johnsonian Professor of Philosophy at Columbia University, analyzes the metaphorical uses Plato makes of weaving; Joan Simon, Curator-at-Large for the Whitney Museum of American Art, examines the small format and its function as an essential aspect of Hicks's artistic production; and Nina Stritzler-Levine considers the specific design connections between the weavings and the larger architectural works. The catalogue also features entries by the artist about the individual weavings, color photographs of all work in the exhibition, and photographs, drawings, and sketches that document this unique artistic and design practice.





ABOVE *Rue de Marronniers*
Made in Paris, 1973
Alpaca and silk, 9.5" h x 6" w
Collection of Monique Lévi-Strauss

COVER *Monsieur Hulot*
Made in Paris, 1988
Synthetic thread and silk, 9.5" h x 5" w
Collection of the artist

RELATED PROGRAMS

An array of lectures, panels, and other offerings will be presented in conjunction with the exhibition. For further information, please call 212-501-3011 or e-mail programs@bgc.bard.edu.

EXHIBITION TOURS

Group tours of the exhibition may be scheduled Tuesday through Friday between 11:15 a.m. and 4:00 p.m., and on Thursdays until 7:00 p.m. Reservations are required for all groups. For further information, please call the Bard Graduate Center Gallery at 212-501-3013 or TTY 212-501-3012, or e-mail gallery@bgc.bard.edu.

GENERAL INFORMATION

The Bard Graduate Center is located at 18 West 86th Street, between Central Park West and Columbus Avenue, in New York City. Gallery hours are Tuesday through Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Thursday from 11:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. Admission is \$3 general, \$2 seniors and students (with valid ID), and free on Thursday evening after 5:00 p.m. For further information about the Bard Graduate Center and upcoming exhibitions, please visit our website at www.bgc.bard.edu.

UPCOMING EXHIBITION, FALL 2006

James Athenian Stuart: Neoclassical Pioneer

The first comprehensive study of Stuart's remarkable career as an architect and designer

BGC

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