



## Sheila Hicks: Weaving as Metaphor

**FROM JULY 12 THROUGH OCTOBER 15**, the Bard Graduate Center in New York City was presenting its first solo show of works by a living artist. Sheila Hicks: Weaving as Metaphor featured more than 150 pieces, most of them measuring about 9 by 5 inches. Because of the relatively small scale, the visual effect of the installation resembled numerous pages from brightly colored books, displayed in lively rhythm around the walls. These “pages” comprise a visual narrative of Hicks’s life as an artist. Many of the weavings stand on their own, while others are studies for larger commissions. Remarkably, works from thirty years ago, even her industrial commissions for companies such as Air France and Knoll, seem as fresh and innovative as recent compositions.

Organized by Nina Stritzler-Levine, director of exhibitions for the center, *Weaving as Metaphor* grouped together works with similar patterns or themes, such as a series based on lighthouses (“phares” in the French titles of the pieces). Hicks now lives in France, and many pieces were created there. The exhibition labels documented where each work was created, which contributed to its metaphorical content. For example, the fact that *Shoelaces* (made of actual shoelaces and their paper labels) was made in Paris evokes the idea of shoes walking along sidewalks of the city.

Some of the recent (2005) work is in Silksteel, stainless-steel fiber developed in the late 1990s by Hicks and Japanese artist Junichi Arai. Impervious to fire and water, these

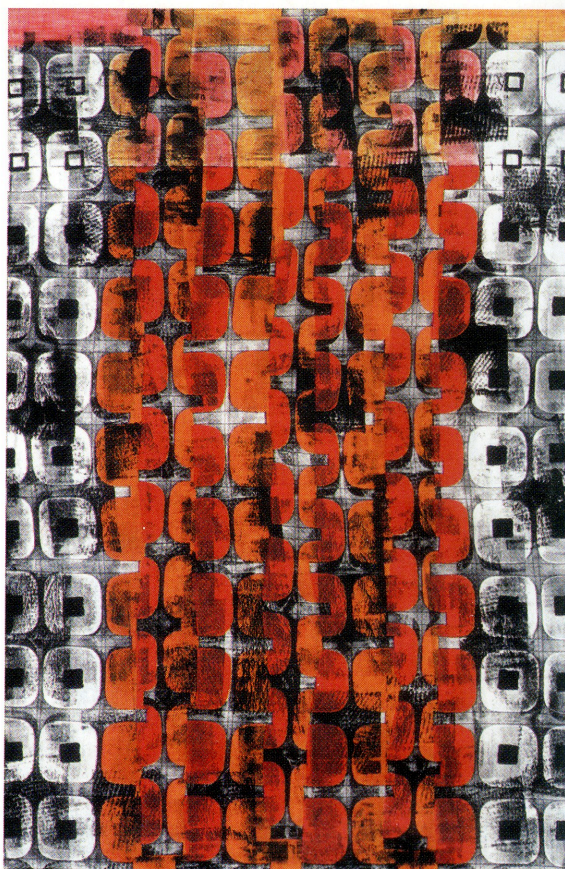
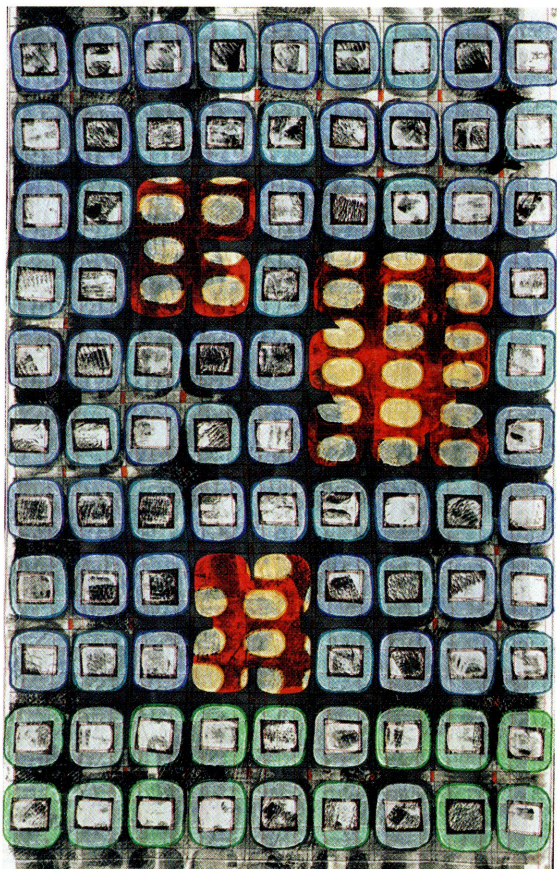
*LEFT: Shoelaces, made in Paris, c. 1985; silk, cotton, bast fiber, wool, shoelaces, synthetic fibers, paper; woven, reversible, all selvages finished; 12¼" x 8¾". Collection of the Philadelphia Museum of Art. RIGHT: Os (Bones), made in Paris, 1965; each piece, 8½" x 1" x 1". Collection of the artist. Photo: Bastiaan van den Berg.*

densely woven pieces shimmer with metallic luminescence. In contrast, delicate, open works displayed in a double-sided case have a completely different feeling, with monofilaments quivering like spider webs. The installation respected the diverse materials used by Hicks; backlighting was provided for translucent and loosely woven pieces. Although it would have been gilding the lily, mirrors could have been positioned to show the backs of a few works.

The exhibition was enhanced by an informative video, *Opening the Archives* (2005), photographed and directed by the artist’s son, Cristobal Zañartu. In the video, Hicks comments on photographs of the people and places that have inspired her weaving for four decades, especially in Mexico, South America, India, and Morocco. The Bard Graduate Center has produced an extraordinary hand-finished catalog of the exhibition, based largely on designs sketched in 2000 by Sheila Hicks. ●

For catalog information, see Resources, page 78.





## Jeanne Williamson and Katherine Porter

**TWO VERY DIFFERENT APPROACHES** to textile art produced in series were displayed at the Danforth Museum of Art in Framingham, Massachusetts, from April 5 to June 4. Jeanne Williamson's *Stitched Monotypes* were shown in a gallery to the left of the museum lobby, while Katherine Porter's *Embroideries* were installed in a gallery to the right. The works provided glimpses of landscape and of the artists' thought processes as they progressed through a series.

Jeanne Williamson's twenty-five abstract whole-cloth quilts were from a group of more than sixty works, produced since 2002, in which plastic fence material is used as both a tool and an image. In the *Orange Construction Fence Series*, she is interested in the interaction of the fence grid with the landscape; suggestions of architectural and natural elements appear through the spaces in the fence. Williamson explores the ways in which the fence both obscures the landscape and calls attention to it. She applies layers of color and texture by printing with textile paints and then stamping, painting, and machine stitching. The imagery often resembles frames of film moving rhythmically over the surface.

In the *Skeletal Fence Series*, Williamson has printed with just a jagged strip of fence material; she notes the

*LEFT: Jeanne Williamson, Orange Construction Fence Series #38, 2005; monoprinting, handpainting, and machine stitching on cotton; 49" x 30½". RIGHT: Jeanne Williamson, Orange Construction Fence Series #25, 2004; monoprinting, handstamping, handpainting, pastels, and machine stitching on cotton; 47½" x 31½". Photos: David Caras. See more images at [www.jeannewilliamson.com](http://www.jeannewilliamson.com).*

resemblance to a spine when the strip is placed vertically and to an urban landscape when horizontal. These small works have layers of silk organza stitched over the painted surface. The organza softens and sometimes obscures the images. Tightly spaced machine stitching forms a background in many of the pieces, providing a trapunto effect that creates a tension: will the image emerge from or be held behind the organza veil?

Katherine Porter is a widely exhibited abstract expressionist painter whose embroideries closely resemble her painting style. She has produced only seventeen of these small works since the 1970s; she embroiders during travel, often working outdoors. The thirteen embroideries in this exhibit have a painterly quality, with thick strands of thread that resemble brush strokes. Many of the elements in the earlier, less complicated pieces seem drawn from traditional embroidery of ancient cultures. In the