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## Sheila Hicks, Weaving as Metaphor

The Bard Graduate Center, New York City, 12 July-15 October, T: 212-501-3000 [www.bgc.bard.edu](http://www.bgc.bard.edu)

This exhibition features the small-scale work of American artist Sheila Hicks. On view are examples of her earliest explorations into weaving while a student at Yale, during her seminal years living and studying in Mexico and Chile in the 1950s and 1960s, her designs for industry in the 1960s and 1970s, and her most recent work using engineered fibres and alternative materials. Hicks, who has lived in Paris since the late 1960s, is best known for her monumental fibre works in public and private collections worldwide. In contrast, the Bard exhibition has chosen to focus on her intimately scaled ruminations of colour, texture, and material to illustrate a process which, in Hicks's terms, "explores different channels of investigation" and "builds bridges between disciplines". As the title suggests, Hicks's textiles in a microcosmic way represent the value and relationship of fabric and society.

Curator Nina Stritzler-Levine assembled 195 objects from several institutions including MoMA, the Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum in New York, and numerous private collections. Stritzler-Levine was introduced to this body of work in 2004 when visiting Hicks, who was then in the process of digitally archiving the thousands of miniatures she had produced since the 1950s. Stritzler-Levine recognized the limited literature on these miniatures and the seed for this exhibition was planted.

To see this exhibition is to experience Sheila Hicks as world traveler, anthropologist, poet, student and of course weaver. The third floor gallery is perfectly suited for the miniatures, mounted as individual works of art, some evoking sheet music and manuscripts. The textiles are predominantly single-element constructions made on Hicks's small

Saint Louis Art Museum gift of the Artist in memory of Frances Weingart



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square frame made from painting stretchers; others are 3-dimensional assemblages. Interspersed among the textiles are Hicks's journals with accounts of her travels, sketches of designs, and colour studies helping to convey her physical and spiritual journey that continues today. It is through this discipline that Hicks has created anew the theories of colour and design taught by her Yale professors Josef Albers and Louis Kahn. Additionally, exposure to Andean textiles in the 1950s revealed how the essence of structure, pattern, texture and scale informs her work.

The catalogue, published by Yale University Press and designed by Irma Boom, plays with scale by exaggerating font size: while textured rough hand-cut cotton paper and a grid-pattern layout all echo Hicks's oeuvre. The book features essays, ranging from an analysis of Plato's view of weaving as metaphor for a just society by Arthur C. Danto, Columbia University Professor of Philosophy, to a structural analysis by Joan Simon, Curator-at-Large for the Whitney Museum of American Art. Finally, curator Nina Stritzler-Levine writes about Hicks's work in relation to architecture.

Hicks's interpretation reviews all that she knows and cares about in the world, such as architecture and environments, colour and very importantly, materials. She has quite literally used the linguistics of weaving – warp, weft, thread, tension, selvedge – and has rewritten it into a new language that encapsulates her life experience.

The exhibition, like the book, successfully brings art and textiles to a new audience. Both book and exhibition are an appreciation of Sheila Hicks as an artist whose engagement with life, her experiences, and her sense of the universal are intimated in these miniature recordings as she works to write a new language using the elements of fabric and weaving. ●●● **Joanna Dolan Ingersoll**  
**07 Ringlets** 1993 rubber bands, paper clips, 31 x 12 cm  
**08 Rue des Marronniers** 1973 Alpaca and silk, 23 x 15 cm

Collection of Monique Lew-Strauss/Ken Scott, fashion fabric