

# Sheila Hicks

## Travelling Threads

24 May – 10 September 2023

“What is my work? I have studied painting, sculpture, photography and drawing, but my strongest attraction is to textiles. I make a kind of textile art. I develop environments, fabricate thread objects, weave textiles, build up soft sculptures, bas-reliefs, and I design and make functional things from thread.” (Sheila Hicks)

Moving beyond the classic model of textiles and weaving, Sheila Hicks has built an unclassifiable and ineluctably pre-eminent body of work that transits freely between art, design and decoration, and between modernist heritage and non-western traditions. As a student under Josef Albers at Yale University in the USA, she embarked on a life-changing journey to South America in the late 1950s where her passion for pre-Columbian textiles was forged.

This monograph exhibition is the first dedicated to the artist in Spain and presents the varied nature of her oeuvre, from works with architectural dimensions to small woven works and photographs. The exhibition adopts a non-chronological perspective to prioritise sensory experience and foster a more direct immersion in the artist’s formal, material and chromatic world.



Ayuntamiento  
de Málaga

AGENCIA PÚBLICA PARA LA GESTIÓN DE  
LA CASA NATAL DE PABLO RUIZ PICASSO  
Y OTROS EQUIPAMIENTOS MUSEÍSTICOS  
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Centre  
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## Between arts and crafts

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Sheila Hicks was born in 1934 in Hastings, Nebraska (USA) and has been living in Paris since the mid-1960s. She enrolled at Yale University in 1954 and studied notably with painter Josef Albers, a historic Bauhaus figure and great theorist of colour, who headed the Design Department. In contact with him, Hicks embarked on work that was open, free and multi-faceted, embracing both art and craftwork and breaking down the hierarchy between them. She also paid great attention to colour and how it fits into space.

George Kubler, a professor of Latin American art history, sparked her interest in pre-Columbian textiles, which became the subject of her thesis. It was in this context that in 1956 she first started weaving small pieces of cloth on a frame of her own making. She later gave them the title *Minimes*. The light portable setup she refers to as her “travelling companion” lends itself well to regular practice and she has continued to work in this way to the present day.

Sheila Hicks’ interest in textiles and the choice of this medium for her artwork is far from trivial. Used in clothing, as a canvas for paint or an element in furnishing, it embodies the fluidity between fine and applied arts, and reconciles art with daily life. It is also an ideal technique for drawing and deploying colour in space.



*Caid Nejjai*, 1976. Wool, silk, cotton, 24 x 14 cm  
© Centre Pompidou, MNAM-CCI/Philippe Migeat Dist. RMN-GP

## *Minimes* by Monique Lévi-Strauss

“Known for her monumental textile works, Hicks calls her small formats *Minimes*. She weaves them in or away from her studio. These intimate poems are also testing benches for her future creations. She weaves them on a wooden frame about 30 cm by 20 cm on which she fixes nails on the upper and lower sides and then passes a thread from the first upper nail to the first lower one, then to the second upper one and so on, to build a warp. She then inserts the wefts of the colours chosen by her painter’s eye, leaving vertical slits that give pliability. Selvages on the four sides account for the perfect finish of these small masterpieces.”

Excerpt from the text « The Rear View Mirror », in the catalogue *Sheila Hicks, Lifelines*, Éditions du Centre Pompidou, Paris, 2018

## Discovering Latin America

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In 1957, Sheila Hicks was awarded a Fulbright scholarship to go to Chile. It was to be a year rich in discoveries and encounters for her. She travelled to several countries in Latin America, meeting communities of weavers and also artists



*Poncho sellers, Otavalo market, Ecuador, 1957.*  
Photographic print. Courtesy Atelier Sheila Hicks, Paris

(Jesús Rafael Soto), writers (Pablo Neruda), and architects (Carlos Villanueva). Photographer Sergio Larrain invited her to travel with him to the south of Chile, where she took pictures of the magnificent scenery. These journeys inspired many photographs and it was also during this time that she started her first sketchbooks, a practice she carries on today.

After travelling through much of South America in 1957 and 1958, Hicks made a journey to Mexico. Her discovery of the landscapes, archaeological sites, local culture and contemporary creation marked a turning-point for the young woman, and she settled in Mexico for several years. Before that, in 1959, she had obtained a grant to travel to France, and discovered Europe. On her return to Mexico, she worked with weavers in small workshops using local techniques, which inspired her own work. Her career took off at the start of the 1960s, when she started to exhibit and received her first commissions.



*Amarillo*, 1960. Wool, 190 x 68 cm © Centre Pompidou, MNAM-CCI/Georges Meguerditchian/Dist. RMN-GP

## Open work

Through the 1960s, Sheila Hicks had the opportunity to work for industry, designing furnishing fabrics. She also received a number of commissions for building interiors in New York.



*Maquette for the Ford Foundation Commission*, 1966 - 1967  
Linen, silk, anodised aluminium, 65 x 81 cm. © Centre Pompidou, MNAM-CCI/Georges Meguerditchian/Dist. RMN-GP

Experimenting with monumental formats broadened the perspective of her works, which tapped as much into textiles as into sculpture and architecture, leading the artist constantly to experiment with new forms of staging. In 1966, she set up her studio in Paris. In that same year, she travelled to the Kerala region of India to work on the design of various textile collections in large, traditional weaving mills.



*Córdoba*, 2011. Linen, 14 elements, variable dimensions  
© Centre Pompidou, MNAM-CCI/Philippe Migeat/Dist. RMN-GP

Parallel to these commissions, Hicks continued to develop her artwork and took part in several exhibitions, especially "Wall Hangings" at the MoMA, New York, in 1969, where she exhibited *The Evolving Tapestry: He/She* (1967-1968). This open, evolving work comprises piled-up elements in linen and silk, has no fixed and final shape, and may be exhibited in many different ways. These "soft sculptures" bring her close to the Anti-Form and Post-Minimalism movements in the United States.

## The challenge of art in architecture

In 1970, the Moroccan government invited Sheila Hicks to work with Moroccan artisans. She was fascinated by Islamic culture and her visual vocabulary was enriched in contact with the arts, architecture, souks and craftwork. She went to visit

rural communities, where she learned traditional embroidery and weaving techniques. When she then made rugs in local workshops, she sought to remain true to the know-how she had observed. The wall hangings she designed there featured rounded and pointed arches, blending perfectly into Moroccan architecture.

Many architects and decorators took an interest in her work and commissioned projects from her, especially in France for textile panels for Boeing 747s and an installation for the IBM tower in the business district of La Défense. Her textile creations added warmth and sometimes colour to interiors that were often cold and functional. In 1977, she worked on the sets for Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining*.

Sheila Hicks' first retrospective took place in 1974 at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam. One of the works on display was a large soft sculpture titled *Trapeze de Cristobal* (1971), made of colourful yarn falling down from the ceiling and spreading across the floor. Colour is thus deployed in space and the artist draws the onlooker's attention to its relationship with the architecture surrounding it. With this interplay of colour and fabrics, Hicks invented a new form of perception combining sight and touch.



*Prayer Rug*, 1972 - 1973. Wool, cotton, 255 x 115 x 20 cm  
© Centre Pompidou, MNAM-CCI/Philippe Migeat/Dist. RMN-GP



*Lianes de Beauvais*, 2011 – 2012. Linen, pearl cotton, wool, silk, nylon, 430 cm each element  
© Centre Pompidou, MNAM-CCI/Philippe Migeat/Dist. RMN-GP

## Infinite possibilities

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Over the next decades, Sheila Hicks continued to produce work on a monumental scale, adapting her works to the places they were to be exhibited in. She also took an interest in manufactured fabrics and clothing, which she would borrow from the places where she was invited. In Jerusalem in 1980, for example, she designed an 800 square metres textile environment using army uniforms.

She continued to travel extensively, for example to Japan in 1989, where she had an exhibition and worked in collaboration with designers, artists and architects on various commissions. In 1993, she made *Four Seasons of Mount Fuji*, a 103-m multicoloured *bas-relief* for the lobby of a theatre facing Mount Fuji.

After weaving linen, wool and silk, Hicks started exploring stainless steel fibre in the early 2000s. New safety regulations requiring the use of non-flammable fabrics in public buildings prompted her to experiment with new materials. She also adopted a new high-pressure technique to apply colour to polyester fabric and produce a wide range of colours with some novel effects.

In the 2010s, Sheila Hicks took part in many international exhibitions, including the Biennales in São Paulo (2012), Whitney (2014), Sydney (2016) and Venice (2017).

When crafting and exhibiting her works, Sheila Hicks is always mindful of their surroundings, making sure that the works occupy the space effectively and interact with it. Given the limits imposed by museum architecture, she has produced works for public spaces on more than one occasion. One such example was *Hop, Skip, Jump, and Fly. Escape from Gravity* (2017), installed for one year on the High Line in New York. This “ephemeral composition” was made with long, brightly coloured tubes snaking their way over more than 200 metres through the grasses on the skyline.



Portrait of Sheila Hicks, 2023 © Cristóbal Zañartu

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## Catalogue

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## Guided tours

The mediation team offers you guided tours to discover the works from the exhibition, in an active and sensitive way.

### Individual tours

Visit in Spanish included in the price of the ticket. Inscription on the same day at the reception. 25 people maximum.  
Wednesday at 6 pm

### Groups

In Spanish, English and French, by prior reservation:  
educacion.centrepompidou@malaga.eu.  
25 people maximum

Discover all our activities (tours, workshops, events...) on our website:  
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## Information

### Opening hours

9.30 am to 8.00 pm, every day  
Ticket offices close at 7:30 pm  
The museum is closed on Tuesdays (except holidays and days before holidays), 1 January and 25 December

### Prices

Temporary exhibitions:  
€4, concessions: €2.50  
Semi-permanent exhibitions:  
€7, concessions: €4  
Semi-permanent and temporary exhibitions:  
€9, concessions: €5.50

### Contact

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