SHEILA HICKS: 50 YEARS
November 5, 2010 - February 27, 2011
Teacher Guide

FREE GROUP VISIT HOURS BY APPOINTMENT:
Tuesday - Friday 8am - 4pm

FREE PUBLIC MUSEUM HOURS:
Tuesday - Saturday 10am - 5pm & Sunday 1pm - 5pm

TEACHER RESOURCES, WORKSHOPS, & EXHIBITION INFORMATION:
www.addisongallery.org

© Sheila Hicks, M’hamid, 1970, silk, vicuña wool, razor clam shell, 9 1/4 X 7 in, Cleveland Museum of Art
The Artistic Life of Sheila Hicks

Born in Hastings, Nebraska, in 1934, Sheila Hicks has spent the better part of her life traveling around the world doing technical, cultural, and visual research in Mexico, Chile, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Germany, India, and in Paris, where she has lived since 1964. Inspired by the textiles, baskets, architecture, textures, climates, and colors of each place she visits, Hicks’s art and designs are a reflection of her individual expression, continual ingenuity, and respect for culture, history, and the present moment.

The Addison’s fifty-year retrospective of Hicks’s work illuminates each aspect of her career, from her small, woven minimes to her monumental architectural installations, from her internationally-known fabric designs to her intimate and mysterious wrapped bundles. The range and evolution of her work and thinking are complemented by representations of Hicks’s artistic and cultural inspirations and her journalistic daybooks.

The exhibition’s exciting glimpse into one artist’s career will prompt students’ close observation of their own environment and foster connections to their lives and those of others around the world – all while connecting to multiple aspects of classroom curriculum from math and technology to the development of language to local history and cultural awareness.

weave
transitive verb
1a: to form (cloth) by interlacing strands (as of yarn); specifically: to make (cloth) on a loom by interlacing warp and filling threads b: to interlace (as threads) into cloth c: to make (as a basket) by intertwining
2: spin 2 —used of spiders and insects
3: to interlace especially to form a texture, fabric, or design
4a: to produce by elaborately combining elements : contrive b: to unite in a coherent whole c: to introduce as an appropriate element: work in —usually used with in or into
5: to direct in a winding or zigzag course especially to avoid obstacles
origin Middle English weven, from Old English wefan; akin to Old High German weban to weave, Greek ὑφαίνειν to weave, ὑφός web. First Known Use: before 12th century
http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/weaving

While often considered a weaver, Sheila Hicks has also engaged and experimented with a wide range of fibers and techniques to create and inspire. Wrapping, stacking, folding, twisting, assembling, knotting, merging, stitching, sewing, bundling, and tying are all part of her artistic vocabulary where color, shape, texture, form, and structure are integrally connected.

The ancient and important world history of weaving, from manual to industrial technologies, is also an integral part of Hicks’s thinking and expression, while weaving, in its multiple and poetic interpretations and uses, is a metaphor for her life and work.
Why do we collect shells at the beach, save leaves from autumn trees, make photographs of places we visit? How can the gathering and arranging of objects, images, and words reflect our experience of place?

In addition to the titles of her work, Sheila Hicks embeds her environments in her work variously through color, pattern, material, structure, and process. In *Willow* (1960) a sand-colored ground gives way to floating wisps of dark brown, marking the momentary encounter with the flickering light and rustling of leaves of trees Mexico. Hicks calls upon the artist as interpreter of experience through intensely personal abstractions of time spent and lived encounters.

Throughout her life – and especially in the early stages of her career – Sheila Hicks digested her environment by photographing the textures and forms of her surroundings and making sketches and notes about what she was experiencing and learning in numerous daybooks. These artistic journals reveal a journey of discovery through a collage of words and images that reflect her observations and absorption of the various cultures, techniques, and environments she experienced. Additionally, her minimes (in French, pronounced mee-neem) - small, transportable weavings such as *Willow* - served as her laboratory where she could test, experiment, and innovate.

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**Record of Place**

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**Recording Place Activity Idea**

Explore the place you are in. What colors, textures, lines, shapes, forms, patterns, structures do you see? Using fabrics and/or papers of varying textures and weights, create a collage that captures your sensory experience of that place.

How else can you record the places you experience? How can sketching, painting, writing, collecting, collaging, photographing, recording, mapping be used to express a place that is familiar or new? Individually or in groups, spend time in a place and use one or multiple modes of recording to create a picture, report, or narrative about the place.

Share your work with the school or the public through an exhibition or presentation.
Thinking Outside the Loom: Tradition & Innovation

What can we learn from studying history and tradition? How do innovations reflect personal and cultural experience?

Since her undergraduate and graduate years at Yale University in the 1950s, Sheila Hicks's has traveled the globe to research weaving histories and methods. She has acquired deep understanding of and direct experience with indigenous weaving techniques from Latin America to India to Japan. She has used these traditions as starting points from which to innovate her personal work and in her consultations with craft collaboratives and communities.

Throughout her fifty-year career, Hicks has continually reinvented the materials, forms, locations, and intentions of her art. She may start a weaving on a loom then remove it part way to create something more free-form and sculptural. She may loop, wrap, and drape miles of wool threads in dazzling colors to hang from a ceiling in a public space. She might bury a precious personal relic in a ball wrapped tight with colorful and contrasting layers of cloth and string. She has created tasseled wool "prayer rugs" for an exhibition in Morocco and petit-point panels for Air France's 747s. Hospital laundry has been stitched together to form diaphanous curtains for exhibitions.

Due to her sensitivity to materials and methods of production, and to her endlessly inventive spirit and abilities, Sheila Hicks has been invited as:

_a consultant to communities, governments, and industries seeking to modernize while preserving indigenous and culturally honored craft traditions.... The global economy today relies to a great extent on the imposition of foreign methods on local industries in developing countries, rather than on devising ways to sustain culturally honored traditions by teaching local populations how to use new technology. Hicks’s approach has demonstrated how local methods may be successfully reinterpreted._

–Nina Stritzier-Levine in _Weaving as Metaphor_, p. 350

Innovating Traditions Activity Idea

- Use fabric and thread to write a poem.
- Wrap something from your childhood in a tight bundle and write a narrative that refers to _but does not reveal_ your secret object.
- Hang an art exhibition from the ceiling instead of the walls.
- Make stacks of laundry on your bedroom floor in different configurations. Then try hanging them around the room and see how you can animate them. Photograph your variations.
- Stitch together your old clothes or sheets to create a curtain or sculpture.
- Research craft collectives around the globe to see how traditional communities are using modern methods, materials, and economic strategies to both preserve tradition and prosper.
- Find out about a traditional craft from your community or culture and learn how to do it _– and perhaps teach others in the class._
Material Experimentation

How can we reinvent the everyday object? Can we “recuperate” materials and objects by using them for new purposes while honoring the origins and history of their use?

Sheila Hicks’s use of natural and recuperated objects brings her environment into her work and is evidence of her experimental nature. A razor clam shell from the sea might intersect an earthly woven form, while rolled newspaper simultaneously reflects and disguises current events.

Using such familiar materials as rubber bands, paper clips, plants, rocks, clothing, sheets, and even shoelaces, Hicks breaks down artistic boundaries while becoming more mindful of her surroundings. While selecting and integrating found materials in her work, she is conscious and respectful of their personal, cultural, and artistic history while giving them new life in her creations.

Similarly, the source and cultural meaning of the fibers Sheila Hicks has discovered around the world are used with both integrity and innovation. Whether working with indigenous wool and cotton in Mexico, linen in France, silk from Japan or Korea, steel mesh from the United States, or synthetic fibers plentiful in urban centers, her explorations connect her to the climate, history, textures, techniques, and forms of each unique culture.

récupérer (French)
transitive verb
1. to get back, to recover;
2. to fetch;
3. to salvage; to reclaim;
4. to save;
5. to make up;
6. to appropriate;
7. to rehabilitate.
http://www.wordreference.com/fren/recuperer

Experimenting with Integrity Activity Idea

Collect objects that have finished their uses. Packaging, scraps, fallen leaves, dead flowers, old clothes, isolated stones, old magazines. Experiment with ways that you transform the materials into artistic objects that retain the source or meaning of their original use.

Some options for materials collection:
- Each student can bring in materials from home to be used by him/her or shared with the class.
- Students can go in small groups or together around the school, adjacent neighborhoods or downtown areas to find materials that reflect their experience of those places.
Why Weave? Where Form Meets Function and Beyond

Where does weaving come from? Why are so many materials in our daily lives woven? How does weaving reflect the evolution of civilization?

The first human weavings were likely vessels used by hunters and gatherers to collect food items. In developing weaving techniques, humans were quite possibly inspired by birds and insects, noticing that the weaving and spinning of nests and webs aided in shelter and food collection. The beaver lodge demonstrates how branches, grass, and rocks from the immediate environment can be interlaced to create large, solid structures simultaneously providing family shelter, protection from predators, and a means to catch food.

Some thousands of years ago, in addition to vessels, humans began to use weaving techniques to make nets to catch fish and trap animals and to make clothing, enabling them to survive in colder climates as they migrated to environments with more resources. As the technologies for using readily available materials, such as plant fibers, began to evolve, so did the methods and motivations for developing sophisticated patterns, designs, and shapes. While shape is often initially determined by function, it also became refined by aesthetic impulses over time - just as patterns and colors, which originally reflected specific cultural group meaning, have been transformed to convey personal expression. Thus the evolution from tools to craft to art.

teks-
Did you know that technology, technique, architecture, textile, text, tissue, and tectonic all come from the same Indo-European word root teks-, meaning to weave? The meanings of these words reflect the longevity, structure, meaning, and importance of weaving as a technology and a metaphor. What words use the act and attributes of weaving as a metaphor?

Weaving in Everyday Life Activity Idea

Do you know what your clothes are made from? Are they woven? knitted? stitched? Who made them? How did they get to you? Trace the origins of one item of clothing from the raw material to its design and production, then to the branding and marketing, and finally to the retail outlet where it was purchased. Share your finding with the class.

What examples of weaving can you find in your daily life? List, collect, sketch, and/or photograph all of the things you can find one day. Start with the fabrics in your bedroom and bathroom, move through the living room and the kitchen, then see what animals you can find outside that “weave” their homes. You may find additional items in school or elsewhere. Report on your findings.
Weaving as Industry: Local Connections

What has been the personal, local, and global impact of the industrialization of textile production?

In addition to weaving providing shelter for animals and warmth for humans since ancient times, it also helped spark the industrial revolution. Starting at the turn of the nineteenth century in England, then spreading through Europe to the United States and ultimately around the globe, the harnessing of power and the mechanization of production led to unprecedented speeds of manufacture, rises in household incomes, and availability of goods.

Beginning in the 1830s right here in the Merrimack Valley, with the powerful Merrimack River leading to the Massachusetts bay, the textile mills transformed the area from an agricultural community to an immigrant-driven industrial economy seemingly overnight. Lawrence and Lowell are two local cities founded on the development of water power, machine tools, high-speed looms, an exploding immigrant work force, and a supply and demand economy. The town of Andover also had significant mill production.

While at times embracing new weaving technologies and manufactured fibers, Sheila Hicks’s primary method of production is to create things by hand and/or through cooperatives, including her own atelier, or studio, in Paris. Whether developing the woven minimes that she makes on a loom small enough to fit in her handbag, a 300-foot commission for the Fuji City Cultural Center in Japan, or textile patterns for Knoll Associates design company, she is committed to the respect of both the materials and human capital, and to creating intimate connections between textiles and their makers and users.

**industrious**

1: obsolete: skillful, ingenious
2: constantly, regularly, or habitually active or occupied : diligent

http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/industrious

Local History Activity Idea

What signs of the industrial revolution can you find in your community? What was made in the mill buildings near where you live? Who ran the machines? What has since happened to the businesses and the people who worked there?

How have 19th and 20th century authors and artists expressed images and ideas of the industrial revolution through paintings, photographs, poems, books, and songs? What message does Sheila Hicks’s life and work convey about the industrialization of weaving?

What were the benefits and disadvantages of the industrial revolution? Have a classroom debate on the topic.
**Exhibition Connections with *Inside, Outside, Upstairs, Downstairs* & Artist’s Project: Tristan Perich**

**Record of Place**

How do the artists in the exhibition, *Inside, Outside, Upstairs, Downstairs* record place? What mediums, styles, colors, shapes, perspectives, and ideologies are they using to express their experiences?

Consider the differences between artists who use representational images and objects to those who use abstraction to express their visions and ideas.

How does Sheila Hicks’s means of production and expression compare to the painters, photographers, and other sculptors on view?

Compare the 19th and 20th century artists to writers of similar time periods to discover the connections between visual and written expression of ideas.

**Material Experimentation**

How do the materials artists use — and the way they acquire them — speak to the particular time period and perspective of the artist?

Compare the use of materials over the course of the 19th and 20th centuries and into the 21st century.

What do some artists choose to develop their own unique materials?

Where do/can artists find the materials that they use?

**Local History**

What evidence of local industry can be found in the Addison collection?

Why are artists intrigued by local history?

Former Addison artists-in-residence Abelardo Morell and Charles Sheeler were similarly intrigued by the remains of the areas’ industrial history.

Why did Abelardo Morell create *camera obscura* photographs (2002) that overlap the interiors and exteriors of Lawrence’s historic mills?

Why do Charles Sheeler’s images of Ballardvale (1946) appear so barren?

**Weaving, Technology, and Art**

What is the connection between the invention of a revolutionary industrial loom by Joseph Marie Jacquard in 1801, the invention of computers, and the work of current Addison artist-in-residence Tristan Perich?

Tristan Perich employs the binary system to create his machine drawings and his electronic music on exhibit in the Museum Learning Center.

How does Perich’s use of technology to make art and music help you understand how computers work and what you might create with them?

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Books
Republication of a book on the technological evolution and cultural history of weaving by major mid-20th century fiber artist with whom Sheila Hicks's studied at Yale University.

Featuring contemporary artists who are using fabric and weaving to re-contextualize the craft into a more deliberate art-making activity.

Comprehensive catalogue of the Addison's retrospective exhibition.

Republication of seminal text on pre-Columbian Peruvian weaving, embroidery, felt, and braiding that inspired Sheila Hicks.

An overview of varying cultures' weaving, spinning and dyeing techniques, patterns and uses.

Easy-to-do weaving activities with everyday materials for all ages.

Catalogue from an exhibition of Hicks's minimes (miniatures) at Bard Graduate Center for Studies in the Decorative Arts, Design & Culture. Includes essays and poetic statements by Hicks about the beautifully illustrated works.

Picture Books
Geraldine the goat describes each step as she and her Navajo friend make a rug, from the hair clipping and carding to the dyeing and actual weaving.

A story that demonstrates how everything comes from something.

Charlie the shepherd shears his sheep, cards and spins the wool, weaves and dyes the cloth, and sews a beautiful new red cloak.

Sheila Hicks Website
http://www.sheilahicks.com/
Hicks's website presents images of several of her commissioned projects in the context of their initial environments.
Local Resources

Weaving Materials
If you are interested in starting a weaving project in your classroom, contact Katherine Ziskin at 978.749.4198 or kziskin@andover.edu for ideas about materials, supplies, and curriculum connections.

Historic Sites, Programs, and Primary Sources Related to Weaving, Textiles & the Industrial Revolution

Lawrence Heritage State Park
1 Jackson Street, Lawrence 978.794.1655
http://www.mass.gov/dcr/parks/northeast/lwhp.htm
The Visitors Center in an 1840s boarding house features extensive, interactive exhibits on Lawrence textile mill history, industrial weaving, and the important Bread & Roses Strike of 1912. The park also includes area buildings, waterworks, mills, and bridges that offer an experiential education of Lawrence's mill history. Free guided group tours. Contact: Jim Beauschesne.

Lawrence History Center - Immigrant City Archives
6 Essex Street, Lawrence 978.686.9230
www.lawrencehistorycenter.org
Featuring collections and exhibits housed in the former Essex Company offices includes plans, maps, materials, legal documents, correspondence, and books regarding the development of the city, its waterworks, parks, mills, and businesses. Past exhibits and online material also available.

Lawrence Public Library
51 Lawrence Street, Lawrence 978.620.3600
www.lawrencefreeliabrary.org
In addition to books, the library has special collections composed of manuscripts, archives, periodicals, newspapers, photographs, artifacts, and ephemera from across Lawrence’s history to the present and from famous individuals and events to local families and businesses.

Tsongas Industrial History Center/Boott Cotton Mills Museum
115 John Street, Lowell 978.970.5080
www.uml.edu/tsongas
Part of the Lowell National Historical Park where hands-on exhibits and school and teacher programs offer primary sources from which students and teachers can learn about the history and science of the American Industrial Revolution. Topics covered include: labor history, immigration, economics, textile production, globalization, technology/engineering, and impacts of industrialization on nature and society.

American Textile History Museum
491 Dutton Street, Lowell 978.441.0400
www.athm.org
Exhibits and educational programs help students discover the history, science, and art of textiles in America and demonstrate how textiles have influenced our lives from the hand-mades of earliest times up through the mechanized Industrial Revolution, and into the extreme science of the cutting edge present.
Sheila Hicks: 50 Years marks the first museum retrospective devoted to this exceptional American artist and has been co-curated by independent scholar Joan Simon and Addison curator Susan Faxon and produced by the Addison Gallery of American Art. After closing at the Addison on February 27, 2010, the exhibition will travel to:
Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA, March 25 – August 7, 2011

Generous support for the exhibition and its accompanying publication was provided by the J. Mark Rudkin Charitable Foundation, The Coby Foundation, Ltd., Saundra B. Lane, The Poss Family Foundation, Nancy B. Tieken, Able Trust, Target Corporation, Friends of Fiber Art International, Dirck and Lee Born, and several anonymous donors.