

SHEILA HICKS *COSMIC ARRIVALS*

Opening Wednesday 19 May 2021
Until 17 July 2021

It was at a very young age that Sheila Hicks began to observe nature and the power that permeates it. Thanks to her lessons from the artist and teacher Josef Albers and her regular trips to South America, the artist began reflecting on the central role played by Mother Nature, observing the shapes, colors, and trying to see deeper into the details of it.

"Nature determines everything. Climate and light influence space. Each of my works inhabits in a particular place, respects its history, its temperature, its architecture"¹.

Sheila Hicks has come to understand that, in order to give a voice to the fascinating nature that she observed every day in South America, she would have to move away from painting and experiment with a new medium. She found it right in the heart of Pre-Columbian culture: weaving. Abandoning painting was the cause and consequence of a new approach that could not but result in a new medium. For painting dictates that color is placed onto and over the canvas, thereby obscuring it. A relationship of subordination, therefore, which to Sheila was unacceptable. A passion for thread dictates a completely different approach, which she was immediately attracted by. She appreciated its aesthetic power, but also its social, cultural and political role, one that links all the peoples of the world. Weaving is a common language, and it is an intimate one, devoid of the superfluous elements that characterize languages in use. It is no coincidence that weaving is rooted in nature itself. Before becoming artificial, the natural fibers of textiles are part of nature.

Fibers are unmade and recreated in her hands. Cloth is thus the cornerstone of a way of thinking that was developed under the influence of her mentor Albers and continued through the search for a new construction of color and the reuse of textile fibers, often considered functional or decorative.

The materials are represented by the feeling that they give us, even just by looking at them. Wool, cotton, natural or synthetic fibers are what cover and protect our bodies. Our skin knows the sensations that the textiles give us and recognizes them when moving through the space which Sheila brings to life.

Although Sheila Hicks' art has more often been seen through the lens of weaving, the theme of color is just as important. The choice of the textile may very well be the result of her innate "chromophilia"². Sheila treats color as a material. Fibers and colors are the subjects of her choreography.

It is hard to find the right words to describe the most intimate of the feelings and perceptions that her works are capable of giving to the space and to whoever enters it and experiences it. One could perhaps do it by reading a poem or listening to a piece of music. What guides Sheila are rhyming couplets or a harmony, a sort of dance. Indeed, Sheila positions the elements in the space by dancing. Their correlation creates a harmonious cosmos where every element is in its place for a reason, like notes in a musical score. Alone they evoke a sound, together they become music. "I need to make color dance"³.

¹ Sheila Hicks, catalogue of the exhibition *Sheila Hicks Indeed* at the Foundation De 11 Lijnen, Oudenburg, Belgio

² From the title of the essay by Jason Farago in *Predestined Colour Waves. Sheila Hicks*, catalogue of the exhibition Munich, Espace Louis Vitton, 2015, p. 7-14

³ Sheila Hicks in an interview with Clement Diré, *Sheila Hicks: Apprentissage* (Paris: JPR, 2016)