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## Shila Hicks on Weaving Cultural and Creative Exchanges for Friedman Benda's 'Design in Dialogue'

By Nina Azzarello  
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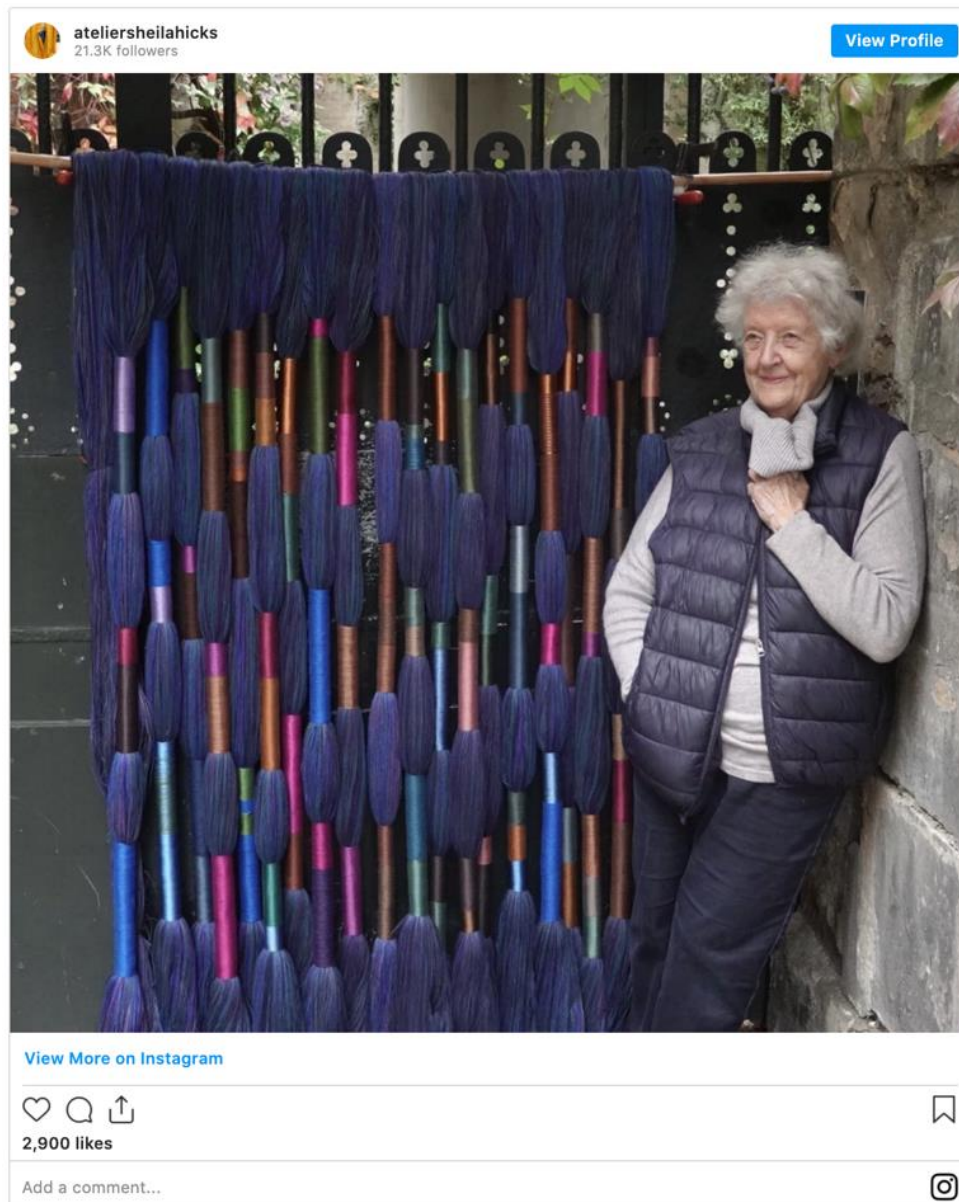
on april 1, 2020, new york gallery [friedman benda](#) initiated a series of online interviews aimed at connecting individuals across the world with leading voices in the creative field. [design in dialogue](#) is a conversational program hosted alternately by curator and historian [glenn adamson](#) and designer [stephen burks](#) that engages with designers, makers, critics, and curators as they reflect on their careers and creative processes. against the backdrop of [COVID-19](#) and global lockdowns, the conversations are held virtually on zoom for 1 hour for anyone in the world to tune in to, and include a participatory Q&A with the audience in attendance. friedman benda has since presented more than 90 episodes, and will continue with a lineup of future guests, each offering unparalleled insight into the sensibilities, musings, and memories of today's creative protagonists. **see our recent feature of [humberto campana on materials and making](#), and [MASS design group on purposeful, hopeful, and healing architecture](#).**

on april 14, 2021, [design in dialogue](#) welcomed american artist [sheila hicks](#) for its 100th episode. over the course of her six-decade career, hicks has evolved a practice

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of grand dimension, drawing on textile traditions worldwide. she creates works that range from the miniature to the monumental, offering new perspectives on structure, materiality, color, texture, and space. in a revelatory conversation alongside both glenn adamson and stephen burks, hicks delves into her life and work for this important milestone in the *design in dialogue* series.

**watch the full video interview at the top of the page and stay tuned as designboom continues to share *design in dialogue* features. see all past episodes — and RSVP for upcoming ones — [here](#).**



**hicks began by describing the vibrant dynamic in her studio in paris, where she lives and work.** situated at the heart of a historic courtyard (interestingly a location

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linked to guillotine creator dr. guillotin and the french revolution), hicks is surrounded by a multicultural and multilingual team. she describes a daily rule of all eating lunch together, enjoying each other's company, and in particular, appreciating their different cuisines. *'I've always been sensitive to anthropology and cultural exchanges,'* she says, having lived in mexico, traveling to paint in chile from 1957-58 on a fulbright scholarship, and residing in france since the 1960s. over her career, hicks has been invited across the globe for various commissions and describes having developed a sensibility for completing creative assignments when abroad — a sort of strategy that involves improvisation and participation. *'I try to fulfill a mission,'* she says of these experiences working globally. *'I try to analyze and be sensitive to why and where and what and for whom. I'm not going to impose my own personal obsessional involvement on everybody. I can do that for myself, in my quiet greenhouse here, but then if I go out, it's because someone's inviting me out, and they must have something in mind. I try to tune into what they have in mind and I try to fulfill it, in the sense of what their expectation might be. that's what allowed me to get to know different people, different cultures, different attitudes and different ages. I try to do my humble best to step up to the plate and make it happen.'*



installation view of 'séance' at design miami/basel 2014 | image courtesy of demisch danant  
read more on designboom [here](#)

**hicks went on to discuss [a project with french design gallery demisch danant](#), which was exhibited for the 'design at large' program at design miami/ basel 2014. 'séance' canvassed the walls with huge, colorful tufts of fabric made from a**

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synthetic color-fast textile, produced in turkey, processed in western europe, and woven in the united states. it originates as pure powdered pigment, which is combined with a binding agent to create a pliable fiber. therefore, the material can be thought of as a translation of color into a three-dimensional form. *'I'm taking a material and springing it on people and challenging them — designers — to think what they might do with it themselves,'* hicks says of the work. *'in a design fair, the big audience is not the people who come to buy things, it's the people who come to look for ideas — take them home, and do something with them themselves. it's the design community. so this is a kind of camaraderie, with colleagues, saying 'look guys, look what i've found — what do you think we can make with this?'* we also put up a table and sat there, for anyone who wanted to sit down and discuss, and think and draw and play and imagine what we might do with this. *it's a magical environment of color, fibers, and and texture.'*



installation view of 'séance' at design miami/basel 2014 | image courtesy of demisch danant  
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**these 'magical environments' exemplify hicks fascination with structure and form, and her diverse approach to textiles and experimental materials.** hicks speaks to the wide range of sources she draws raw materials from — *who made them?* she asks — and the adaptability and anonymity that way of thinking has allowed

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for. *'it's really important to me, because it makes it so lively, and awake, and challenging each time.'* over her career, hicks has paired enriching dialogues with different disciplines with a continued use of intensely saturated color. *'color speaks for itself,'* she said. *'it either grabs you or alienates you. everyone has different feeling for color — it's like food, it's like music. you're either attracted to it, or you walk out of the room.'*



view of the sheila hicks exhibition 'baōli', 2014, palais de tokyo (paris)  
image courtesy of sikkema jenkins & co., new york / photo by aurélien mole  
read more on designboom [here](#)

**finally, a question from the *design in dialogue* audience sparked hicks to discuss the idea of being an 'insider' or 'outsider' in the art world, and adapting to continued change.** *'it's taken 70 years, but now I'm an insider,'* hicks laughs. *'but I'm also a realist. as soon as you think you're an insider, guess what — there's someone down at the gates that's going to let you in on a secret: we're in a new technological age where a lot of things are happening, and you're going to be left on the doorstep all by yourself, because the rest of the world is moving on. so don't just sit there and think of yourself as an insider, because you're going to be left on the porch waiting for someone to bring you a sandwich!'*



migdador, 2018, installation view courtesy magasin III jaffa | image by noam preisman



'untitled', 1980, 'moroccan prayer rug/nejjai', 1972, and 'the silk rainforest', 1975  
image by zachary balber, courtesy of the bass, miami beach

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'blue gros point', ca. 1990, and 'questioning column', 2016  
image by zachary balber, courtesy of the bass, miami beach



'escalade beyond chromatic lands', 2016-17 | image by zachary balber, courtesy of the bass, miami beach.



installation view at 'sheila hicks: seize, weave space', nasher sculpture center 2019  
image by kevin todora, courtesy of nasher sculpture center

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installation view of *baôli chords* (detail), 2014–15 at 'sheila hicks: seize, weave space', nasher sculpture center 2019  
(cotton, wool, linen, silk, bamboo, and synthetic fiber | private collection, courtesy of the mcclain gallery)  
image by kevin todora, courtesy of nasher sculpture center

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***design in dialogue*** is a series of online interviews presented by new york-based gallery **friedman benda** that highlights leading voices from the field — designers, makers, critics, and curators — as they discuss their work and ideas. hosted alternately by curator and historian glenn adamson and designer stephen burks, the conversations are held on zoom for 1 hour and include a participatory Q&A.

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