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Sheila Hicks (Modern Master Tapestries, Inc., 11 East 57th Street): For years I thought that there was something fundamentally arty and gratuitous about woolwork that got above itself and demanded to take equal rank with painting and sculpture. But in 1969 I was rebuked in this by Claude Lévi-Strauss (not the easiest of men to contradict). There were lacunae in the use of thread, he said, which had fallen into disuse since the days of ancient Peru and only demand-

ed to be revived. What he called "the most ancient, perhaps, of all the arts of civilization" had been renewed in spectacular style by Sheila Hicks, a young artist of mixed Anglo-Cherokee and German-Dutch descent. Last year Monique Lévi-Strauss made the same point with truly Gallic concision in her book on Miss Hicks, and meanwhile I had had some experience of Miss Hicks's environmental compositions. These had a largeness of scale and conception that could truly be called sculptural. Ropes thick enough and strong enough for service on the "Mayflower" mingled with lianalike forms that looped and writhed in and out of the general design. The color had an uninhibited brilliance; one was reminded at once of Peruvian feather textiles, of the more dashing inhabitants of the aviary and of the scarlet flowers of that supreme ornament of Madagascar, the tree called *Poinciana pulcherrima*. An erotic outflow was also most insistently present: the visitor was faced not only with the down-flowing floor of long hair that Baudelaire describes in "La Chevelure," but also with the rubies, the pearls and the sapphires with which he hoped to buy the favors of the woman in question.

All this comes out in the big pieces at Modern Master Tapestries. But I also commend especially the miniatures with which Miss Hicks distracts herself in moments of enforced immobility. These ally delicate but purposeful fingerworks to what in French are called *les moyens du bord*, whatever is nearest to hand. Wool remains the basic material, but it is mixed with shells picked up on the seashore, with stray fragments of silk, even with a hotel bill cut into slivers. Imagination here runs free and with it an independence of mind and a fertility of wit that are now more than ever precious to us. These are small bedazzlements, and like nothing else. Through June 15.

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