Sheila Hicks’s star is firmly in the ascendant. From the 13-metre-wide Eclissare Beyond Chromatic Lands (2016–17) in Viva Arte Viva at the Venice Biennale, to the 200-metre-long Hop, Ship, Jump, and Fly: Escape From Gravity (2017) snaking along New York’s High Line, the octogenarian artist’s installations seem to be cropping up everywhere. The show at Alison Jacques Gallery (Hicks’s second) spotlights a more modest strand of her artmaking. Still, the gallery is dominated by the sculptural presence of Grande Boule (2009): a cluster of riotously colourful pouffelike pieces, reminiscent of wholesale bales of yarn. They are vibrantly, joyously tawdry; metallic strands glint through a grab-bag assortment of thread. Suspended nearby is I am at the Gate (2017): thick skeins of golden yellow nearly three-metres-high hang down, Rapunzel-like. These large works recall the accidental beauty of some arrangement glimpsed on a textile factory’s floor, recalling Hicks’s assertion: ‘If you keep your eyes open, you’re going to have a hell of a time.’

When Hicks ignores her own advice, the result is slicker, more minimal – and overall, less engaging. Langue d'Oiseau II (2016–17), a big woven panel of red and orange bands, resembles nothing so much as Rothko reinterpreted by Habitat. It wouldn’t appear out of place in a tasteful corporate lobby – and, as if to suggest so, it’s been placed in the foyer. Elsewhere, patterns skitter and fall out of line; stray filaments offer nuance in otherwise well-behaved works and orderly strands are pleasingly disrupted. Thickly bound tendrils of forest-green peek through risdy threads of saffron yellow and orange in Terre Orange (2015). The effect is to encourage you to look closely and consciously.

That being said, there’s a perceptible tension between the different demands Hicks’s larger and smaller-scale works make in the gallery space. Gigantism doesn’t encourage enjoyment of the tactile details of tone and texture (which are, broadly speaking, some of fibre art’s most compelling qualities) – in fact, it hinders it, encouraging a step backward rather than forward. Is the inclusion of the large pieces a preemptive retort against readings of this work as craft only? At the other end of the spectrum is Hicks’s career-long Minima series: small, framed weaving made in response to trips in Africa, Asia and South America. Their size, flannex and presentation render them more pictorial than other works, while the scale – each comparable to the page of a diary – invites intimacy and close observation. And, overall, they repay this attention. Back from the Front, ‘14’ (2017) harnesses sashiko, a Japanese stitching technique, in an exuberantly haphazard fashion. Perforate quills adorning Ensemble (2009) render the textile reminiscent of a memento picked up on holiday.

A small striped feather insinuates itself into the weft of As If I Did Not Know (2015–16) like a chance encounter. These diminutive works speak eloquently of Hicks’s experiences of travel. Humbled of all is Shaker (2017), a grid of faded scraps from an old man’s shirt, inspired by the make-do-and-mend culture of eighteenth-century Shaker communities. Nearly unraveling, it wavers but holds fast. The humility is touching. For all the largescale projects worldwide, it’s good to see that the grande dame of fibre art still appreciates the small things. Isabella Smith