

# HESSE FLATOW

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## These Six Boundary-Pushing Artists Refuse to Be Defined By Medium

Get to know the brilliant young creatives who are shaping New York City's art scene, one project at a time.

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Installation view of 'Actress,' Brandon Morris's 2025 show at Europa gallery.  
Courtesy of Brandon Morris and Europa

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A spate of young, New York City–based artists are bucking adherence to a single medium to pursue greater, more versatile visions. It's not that they are simply multimedia artists: The ethos is bigger and broader. They have no loyalty to any one material, nor affinity to a label, preferring instead to move fluidly between whatever is needed to bring a project to fruition. What unites them is their determination to realize physically and intellectually ambitious ideas by whatever means necessary.

Of course, it's not novel for artists to dabble with mediums outside of their comfort zones, and many bring in additional resources and team members to help realize more complex one-off endeavors. But for these six creatives, changing up their method is an overarching principle rather than a tangent in the arc of their practices. After all, when everything coalesces into a multifaceted whole, what's the difference between oil painting and sculpture, metalworking and photography, or dance and installation?

## Brandon Morris



Portrait of Brandon Morris. Photography by Kunning Huang. Courtesy of Europa.

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For Brandon Morris, it was the undergrad fashion program at Parsons that equipped him with the necessary technical skills to realize his dreamy, sometimes cyberpunk-accented visions. "It boils down to me wanting to experiment and be open to any and all ideas," says the 25-year-old, who grew up in New Jersey. He's especially drawn to the impulse that drove the Surrealists: "They were trying to bring things into the real world that didn't exist yet by altering reality," he says of the movement.

Though inspired by his artist mother, Morris initially thought that pursuing work in the fashion industry would lead to a stable career. But at Parsons, he realized that the pace of the fashion world wasn't for him, and pivoted to follow his true calling. Taking a year off during the pandemic, he began making sculptural objects, from twisting, corseted lampshades made of leather, nylon, and canvas; to mutated metal teapots that appear to be sprouting out of leather casings; to leather strips sewn together and molded around the shape of a rectangular canvas. "[They're] constructed, kind of like garments," he says of these early endeavors. "I took what I'd learned about how to work with fabric and sewed something three-dimensionally."



"Teapot (Welcome to the Illusion)" by Brandon Morris, 2023, leather and metal teapots.  
Courtesy of Pangée.

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Earlier this year, a solo show at New York's Europa gallery, *Actress*, put Morris on the map, with a group of haunting, semi-translucent light-green Victorian-style dresses fashioned out of fiberglass that appeared to be floating, empty of wearers, over the floor. (He'd originally proposed the concept to Parsons as his thesis show, but it was rejected due to the dresses' lack of wearability.) The artist unveiled something of a sequel to *Actress* last month in a Europa pop-up show in Paris, with a new series of dresses sporting billowing, windswept silhouettes, sculpted with help from industrial fans in Morris's studio. "I did a few tests with the fiberglass and the resin. It's heavy, but light enough that the fans are able to blow up the form under it," he describes.

Reflecting on his decision to pursue art, Morris is relieved to be on what he's certain is the right path. "I'm happy that I trusted myself," he says. "Because I wake up every day and just think about what I'm going to make."

## Emma Safir



Portrait of Emma Safir. Photography by Eric Helgas. Courtesy of Emma Safir and Hesse Flatow, New York.

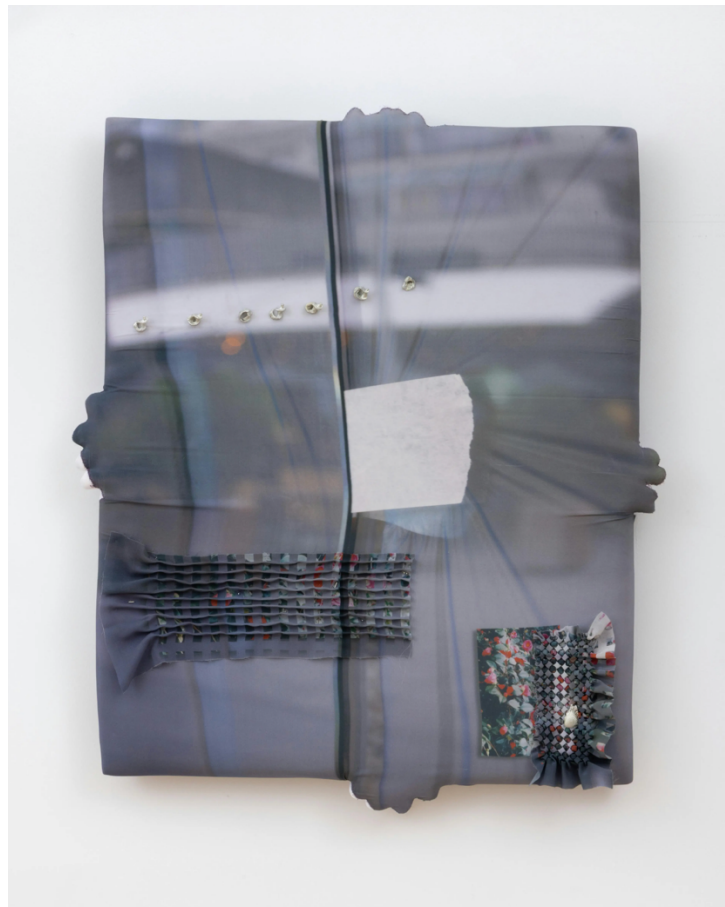


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It's impossible to count the number of layers and materials that make up Emma Safir's works just by looking at them. Standing on the floor or hanging on the wall, each piece is at once a self-contained whole and a void of swirling fabric, colors, and textures that elude as they intrigue. The 35-year-old artist, who was born in New York City and grew up in New Jersey, wouldn't have it any other way. "It's a resistance to being easily defined or digested," says Safir, emphasizing that she's "driven by a material curiosity." Not to mention a resolute independence. "I like to make things how I want, without any rules that I'm supposed to follow."

While her mom guided her in sewing, she later taught herself embroidery and learned from a friend how to make pewter casts in her kitchen. The use of fabrics harkens back to Safir's earlier dream of becoming a fashion designer; after graduating from the Rhode Island School of Design, the artist briefly had her own handbag line. Still, the practical constraints dampened the fun. "I hated having to do things that people needed to be functional," she admits. "That was such a disappointing rule for me."



"STARINA" by Emma Safir, 2025, digitally printed silk, pewter, mirrored glass beads, reflective thread, neoprene, ochre oxid pigment. Photography by Jenny Gorman. Courtesy of the artist and Hesse Flatow, New York.

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She decided to return to school, landing at Yale's Painting and Printmaking MFA program. There, too, she stood her ground, facing pushback for her non-conformity to conventional painting. "I feel that I'm using color, fabric, and photography in the way that people use paint: as a material to manipulate, rather than a technique," she says.

A typical piece is "STARINA"(2025): Mounted over board and upholstery foam, a sheet of digitally printed silk features an obfuscating close-crop of a photo Safir took in London of masking tape on a plastic-wrapped glass door, the blurred reflection of the metropolis forming deep blues and purples. Affixed to the silk are a row of pewter seashells and patches of smocked embroidery, the stitching in one recreating a photo of camellias. "It feels like I'm finishing their outfits," she says of the intuitive way she adorns her surfaces with additional elements. The visual impact is like staring down a nighttime cityscape through fog, as shapes and lines float in and out of focus in the peripheries.

This fall, Safir had a well-received solo show at New York's Hesse Flatow and saw a piece land in the Whitney's collection. Up next year: a solo exhibition at The Buffalo Institute for Contemporary Art. And don't expect her to rein it in. "There's a cultural disdain for the excessiveness of decoration," she reflects. "But I want more."

## Genevieve Goffman



Portrait of Genevieve Goffman. Photography by Chase C. Middleton. Courtesy of Genevieve Goffman.

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As Genevieve Goffman moves through life, she never knows where she may encounter tales that pique her interest. So when something does, she's steadfast in pursuing it. "My art collages together my reflections on the world, be it classical mythology or historical conflicts or fantasy tropes," says the Washington, D.C. native, who studied art at Reed College before getting her MFA at Yale.

All this research and observation funnels into her bodies of work, which offer vivid intimations of larger pictures. "Even if I'm not telling the whole story, the acknowledgement and imagination of the narrative is at the heart of it," she says.

A trio of intricate diorama-like sculptures from a fall solo show at East Hampton's Halsey McKay represent three separate threads, united by isolated mountain backdrops and an uneasy semblance of utopia: the unrealized idyllic Alpine architecture sketches drawn by the late German architect Bruno Taut in reaction to World War I; a French monastery that remained secluded throughout the 20th century; and a Czech mining village that prospered with discovery of radium, only to be exploited by Nazis, then the Soviet Union, and finally abandoned. Each piece melds a 3-D-printed architectural model symbolizing the respective lore and a colorful, richly detailed 2-D scene on a resin slate that expands its fantastical dimensions. Evocative titles, like "Far Away, the Alpine City Glimmered, Light Reflecting off its Golden Turrets and the Icy Mountain Peaks" (2025) for the Taut-inspired piece, nod to Goffman's longstanding love of poetry.



"Far Away, the Alpine City Glimmered, Light Reflecting off its Golden Turrets and the Icy Mountain Peaks" by Genevieve Goffman, 2025, nylon, resin, and dye. Courtesy of Genevieve Goffman.



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Fittingly, Warsaw's Muzeum Literatary tapped the artist for a fall show that pays homage to the late futurist Polish poet Aleksander Wat, particularly his 1956 poem "To Be a Mouse," told from the perspective of a field mouse and reflective of Wat's desire to leave society after experiencing both world wars. Responding to this, Goffman rendered a group of rat statutes placed in a looming circle around a clock with a bite taken out of it, projecting a "nightmarish, clownish recursion of time, how time weighs on someone."

As for her modes of technical execution, though 3-D printing has been a mainstay, it's wherever the wind blows. "I learn the techniques that get me to an end goal," she explains. "I like the freedom, but I also like the challenge of finding materials that meet the needs [of the piece], and fitting together those puzzle pieces."

## Jesús Hilario-Reyes



Portrait of Jesús Hilario-Reyes. Courtesy of Jesús Hilario-Reyes.

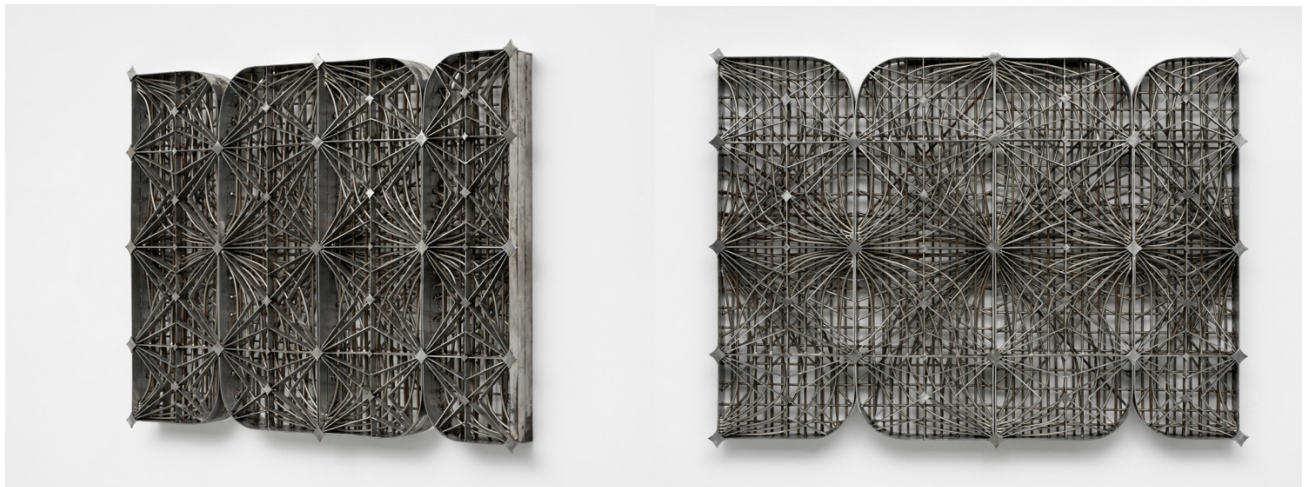


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At some point—he's not sure precisely when—Jesús Hilario-Reyes took up the label of “anti-disciplinary” artist to describe a range that encompasses land art, sonic environments, video, performance, sculpture, installation, and more. “That’s just my way of thinking,” says the 29-year-old Puerto Rico native who grew up in Milwaukee. “It’s a way of making the best possible rendering of an idea.”

Another single word comes to mind, too: movement—as well as its documentation. Performances like the ongoing series *Akin to the Hurricane*—first staged in 2018 and most recently shown at New York’s The Kitchen in 2022—star Hilario-Reyes walking on stilts to glitching electronic soundtracks in glittering accessories inspired by Caribbean traditions of Carnival. Choreographed strobe effects tie into what he refers to as an “interest in photographic optics and capturing subjects, but also the carcerality entangled within representation and light itself.” This thinking is echoed by the artist’s observations as a DJ within queer nightlife communities: “Lighting systems afford the slippage between embodiment and disembodiment,” he says of the transcendental dancefloor. Movement becomes a way to contemplate larger-scale issues, like migration, natural disasters, and other diasporic concepts.



“A River Opens Up Into Many Windows” by Jesús Hilario-Reyes, 2025, steel. Courtesy of Jesús Hilario-Reyes.

Lately, Hilario-Reyes, who studied at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and got his MFA from Yale, has turned to sculptural work. A summer solo show produced by Project for Empty Space highlighted metal pieces like the twisting steel “A River Opens Up Into Many Windows” (2025), which evokes thresholds or “edge worlds”: whether fencing commonly seen in Puerto Rico; mangroves that border land and water; or even the line between DJ and audience. “It’s this beautiful window where you see a bunch of bodies mesh together in darkness and fog, then a spotlight or a laser reveals an elbow or a jawline,” is how he describes the view from the booth. “I’m trying to incorporate these fractal patterns that speak to the spirituality within dance music.”

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Next year, Hilario-Reyes will open two solo shows, one at the sonic practice-focused gallery Canary Test in Los Angeles and another at Chicago's Tala gallery. Despite his immersion in nightlife, the artist doesn't necessarily construe the associated spaces as utopic, celebratory escapes; to him, they're more backdrops where chaos, enacted by revelers, can unfold and recede. "A lot of my works don't have any bodies within them. They have traces of bodies," he says. "To me that speaks to a more realistic representation."

## Ophelia Arc



Portrait of Ophelia Arc. Photography by Siwon Park. Courtesy of Ophelia Arc.

Ophelia Arc remembers herself being a "fidgety kid" growing up in Westchester, New York. This restlessness led her to pick up crocheting as a habit. While studying art at Hunter College and sculpture at Rhode Island School of Design, the artist, now 24, stuck with it. The skill has become key to many of her surreal, uncanny sculptures, as it serves their heavy psychoanalytic bent. After all, the stretchy, vulnerable texture of the yarn handily imbues her pieces with unsettling flesh-like softness and pliability, nodding to artists like Louise Bourgeois and Ernesto Neto.

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"I'm very much into the medium serving the idea, as opposed to the other way around. So I venture out from there," says Arc.

She tends toward pink yarn for its evocation of skin tones and innards—a sort of memento mori to remind us that we're "just a sack of meat," she says. Symbolically laden objects appear within the tangles, often adding autobiographical undercurrents. Take "starvation motive" (2024), in which a misshapen knit element, inspired by human organs, dangles from an IV pole while anchored by a specimen jar, once Arc's from a doctor's appointment, filled with \$30 worth of quarters—a painful reference to how the younger Arc would skew the scale by hiding coins in her clothes to avoid hospitalization for being underweight.



"Starvation motive" by Ophelia Arc, 2024, hand-dyed yarn, thread, tulle, \$30 in quarters, specimen cup, and IV pole. Courtesy of Ophelia Arc.

Other assemblages hold photographs: In "Madonna and Child" (2025), crayon wax, surgical tape, and gauze frame an image of Arc as an infant held by her mother, whose strong religious beliefs contributed to a rift in their relationship. Her adjacent video practice complements her handicraft, taking shape from footage she films of herself in action. Sketches, collages, and palimpsests further explore the artist's interest in the darker sides of medicine and psychology, stemming from her "defiant rebellion as someone who grew up in the psychiatric system," with the involuntary stints she underwent creating a lasting skepticism.

Such ideas informed a hit summer show at New York's Lyles & King, which just announced that Arc is joining the gallery's roster, and in January, she'll have her first LA solo show with Don't Look Projects. Arc's practice allows reckoning with her past, channeling, as she puts it, "a way of seeing that my experience exists, not only for me, but in this greater societal framework."



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## Tasneem Sarkez



Portrait of Tasneem Sarkez. Photography by Hailey Heaton. Courtesy of Tasneem Sarkez.

Material-motifs of gold, logos, rose patterns, and sparkles coalesce in Tasneem Sarkez's work, recalling "surfaces that come up within Arab space so much it's become a pattern," she says. She coined the term *Arab kitsch* to describe this distinct aesthetic. Though, she adds, it's more "emotionally mediated than kitsch in the traditional sense."

Born and raised in Portland, Oregon, to Libyan parents, Sarkez, 23, considers how her identity meshes with the context of America. She visited Morocco as a teenager before studying art at New York University, and it was a revelation. (Previously, she had not been back to North Africa since the Arab Spring populist uprising of the early 2010s.) "I saw myself in the grand scheme of things—being Arab and American—and understood that the two can coexist," she says. "Even now, I'm trying to recreate the feeling that I had, placing myself where I align with Arab culture." Her oil paintings often connect violence with consumer lust, as with "Golden Gun" (2025), which depicts a pair of gold shoes with guns for heels. "I'm taking an object that already exists, then re-contextualizing it to fit within my world and my frame of reference," says Sarkez of such endeavors.

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“Heart Notes no.1” by Tasneem Sarkez, 2025, perfume oil, Boston bottles, acrylic shelves, tape, and inkjet print. Photography by Jack Elliot Edwards. Courtesy of the artist and Rose Easton, London.

The installation “Heart Notes no. 1” (2025) is a multi-tiered shelf that features fake, brightly colored perfumes with labels that evoke cross-cultural conceits, like “Habibi Tings”(blue); “Paris Hilton” (pink); and “White Women Dancing”(acid green). The display takes inspiration, she says, from the bootleg perfume shops she’s noticed in predominantly Arab immigrant neighborhoods in Brooklyn. “There’s something bittersweet in taking the idea of the American dream as a scent and putting it on your body,” she reflects of the impulse to find meaning in consumption.

Following her debut solo show with London’s Rose Easton earlier this year, Sarkez is opening a solo with Pittsburgh’s Romance gallery this month, where she will continue to explore perfumes and other “objects of desire” from her own hybrid perspective. Next spring she’s starting a residency with Selma Feriani Gallery in Tunisia that will culminate in a presentation. (Last year, she was also shocked to learn that her first book, *Ayonha* [2022], a collection of personal drawings and collages, had been chosen by The Metropolitan Museum of Art for its special-edition library.)

In Sarkez’s hands, generic consumer aspirations staged against a politically fraught backdrop become a satirical spectacle—but are not without heart.