

Amirkhani, J. (May 19, 2026). "Emma Safir: A former fashion designer turns fabric into painting." *Art in America Magazine*, Summer 2026, Print.

## Art in America

### Emma Safir

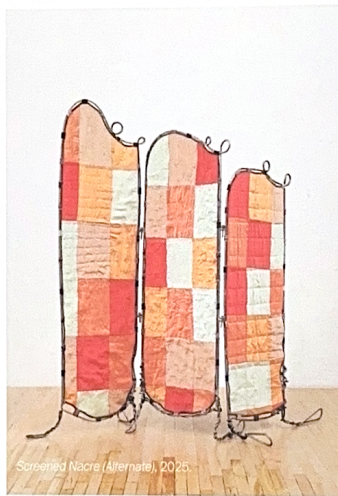
A former fashion designer turns fabric into painting.



Emma Safir: *Pinocchio Seedling X Fashion*, 2025.

What might it take to tackle the en-slick-ification of the art object? Emma Safir's answer to this question arises from her embrace of the sensory capacities inherent in textiles and an eagerness to place oppositional strategies and gestures into new formations and dependencies. The results are works of great mystery and manipulation, each one a reflection on the elusive and ambiguous correspondences between the handcrafted and the digitally (re)produced.

A former fashion designer and experienced printmaker, Safir harnesses her intimate knowledge of clothing, traditional embroidery techniques, and decorative



Screened Nacre (Alternate), 2025.

printed fabrics in jewel-toned silk georgettes and tulle. In works like *APRICOT SILK* (2025) and *BABY DARLING* (2025), Safir builds expressive depth using smocking techniques to lift and pucker the surface as a way of affirming painting's kinship with decoration and ornament. This is recapitulated in her inclusion of glass beads and shells, adding illumination and undulation to the rich, jewel-toned color fields.

Safir's organic, squeezable ovals and rectangles reminiscent of reflective objects and surfaces such as mirrors or screens invite engagement with the works as portals for looking. And yet the process of imagining our faces reflected within Safir's bulbous frames is stunted by her use of opaque matte fabrics and blurred kaleidoscopic patterns (culled from the artist's own archive of personal photographs) printed onto the fabric's surface, rendering the usual pleasures of reflection and entrance into the work difficult if not impossible. Uninterested in stable categories or medium-specific definitions, Safir's works demand a more difficult, ambiguous, and layered process of engagement – one shaped and protected by the artist's resonant combinations of material hierarchies that see craft, fine art, and digital processes thriving and struggling under the weight of their own histories and contemporary viability. In Safir's world, stitches and seams press and puncture the logic of the modernist grid, allowing something messier, more collaborative, and unfixed to unfurl.

– Jordan Amirkhani



Apricot Silk, 2025.

ornamentation in a complex and embodied practice of art-making in an era wrecked by shallow consumption and political decadence. Uninterested in the stagnant hierarchical divides between fine and decorative art, craft-based and digital processes, Safir seeks a framework for addressing the fight against commodification by engaging techniques and strategies from across media (photography, printmaking, and handiwork, most specifically) and histories of mark-making (such as puncturing, stitching, and, at times, digitally altering).

The result of this approach is borne out most in Safir's amoeba-shaped paintings and large-scale tapestries made of digitally