

BmoreArt

Art in a Time of Catastrophe: Soledad Salamé's “Camouflage” at Goya Contemporary

The Multi-Media Artist Interrogates the Cost of Fast Fashion and Offers Models of Repair

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Words: Dora Marke



Begin with “Algae Clusters,” an elegant shock of blue on the right wall as you enter the gallery. The indigo constellations on the top left and bottom right corners recall watery wetlands harboring algae and other plant life. It also suggests a gathering of bruised petals arranged as a bouquet on a translucent surface. Under soft blue brushwork and drawings, a brown ground hovers and fades. It is a work of timeless beauty on handmade paper fashioned from recycled jeans pulp.

Art that dares to insist on poetry in a time of catastrophe—this is the invitation by the Chilean-born multimedia artist, Soledad Salamé, via her current work on display at Goya Contemporary. Titled *Camouflage*, the tone of the show is one of visual beauty enjoined to the fungibility of organic matter, all gently scaffolded by the role of the artist as environmental activist and witness for a beleaguered planet.

Throughout her 40-year career, Salamé has created powerful and poignant work with subjects as diverse as the melting glaciers of Antarctica, Venice’s sinking coastline, and climate-induced migration.

Camouflage continues her unfolding exposition on poetics—her practice of creation and recreation—using the earth’s vulnerability and resilience as subject and objective matter. Salamé’s art reminds us that the earth is still replete with opportunities for repair.

In this exhibit she calls attention to fast fashion, a moniker for cheaply produced and priced disposable clothes copied from designer brands. Between 2000 and 2020, the global production of clothes doubled to 200 billion tons. In that same span of time, the number of wears decreased by 36%, with the clothes often worn once or twice or not at all, generating 92 million tons of waste annually, according to [Earth.org](https://www.earth.org). Fast fashion is the

second or third highest polluter in the world, behind fossil fuels and agriculture, generating more CO2 than aviation and shipping combined.

Those facts are transformed into art by an invitation to look, slowly. Using drone photography and hand-held camera work, the artist pans over 36,000 tons of textile waste brought through Chile's Port of Iquique and dumped in the reddish dunes of the Atacama Desert on the northwest Pacific coast. The result is *Fast Fashion Atacama*, a video produced by the artist and her partner, the photographer and video editor, Michael Koryta. Discarded clothes appear like streams of lava and rolling mountains of trash, mottling and disfiguring the landscape like a camouflage of modernity.



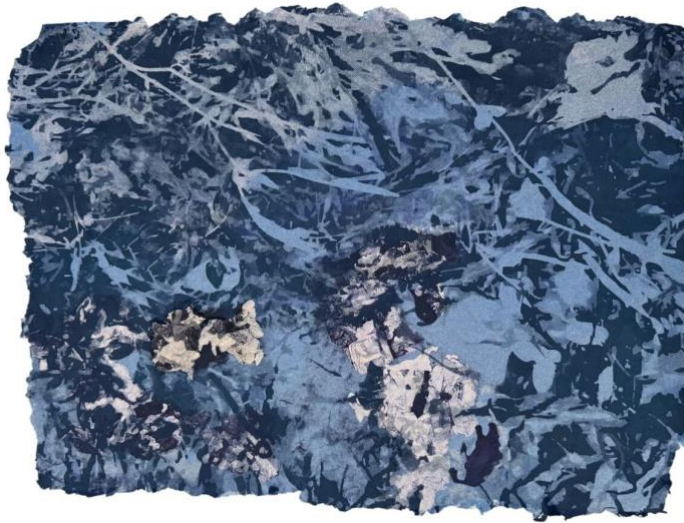
Algae Clusters, 2025, handmade paper with jeans pulp, chine-collé, watercolors, gouache, and drawing

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Installation view of *Camouflage* at Goya Contemporary Gallery, photo by Mitro Hood



In the Ocean I, 2025, silkscreen on handmade paper, jeans pulp



Atacama in Grey, 2024, silkscreen, relief printing, gilded palladium leaf

The conceptual armature of Salamé's project is discernible in the middle gallery: fast fashion's detritus as landscape and ecological riddle explored through what she stated as her frames: the ocean, the desert, and the rainforest. Dresses created from bioplastics are draped with an eye for silhouettes. Unframed prints extend beyond their edges into infinity.

Take in the color palette with its echoes of sand, trees, roots, earth, and sky, and then consider the visibility and ubiquity of fast fashion and its color wheel. How about its variety of textures? Or the materials that ensure the volume and speed of its fabrication? Camouflage as a poetic conceit takes on literal weight in the images on display.

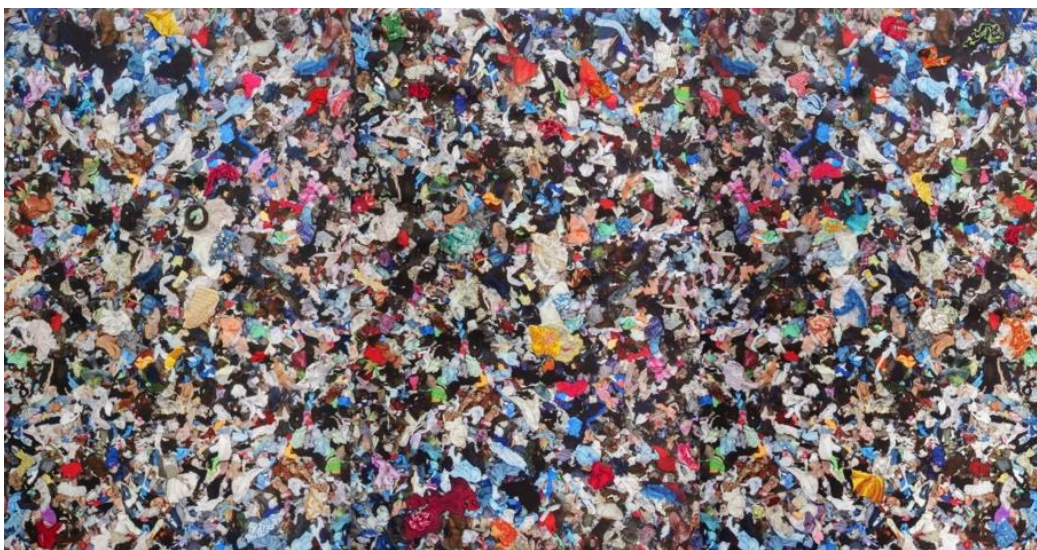
"Fast Fashion Atacama I, II, III, IV," is a quartet of archival prints on canvas, depicting a once pristine terrain of red sand now hidden beneath a patchwork of placid colors typical of a modern closet or the innards of an H&M store.

The flattened scene is a 2-dimensional photograph of the Atacama Desert given a haunting, tactile presence through hand sewn embroidery etching the outlines of clothes that were once lived in. The embroidery not only

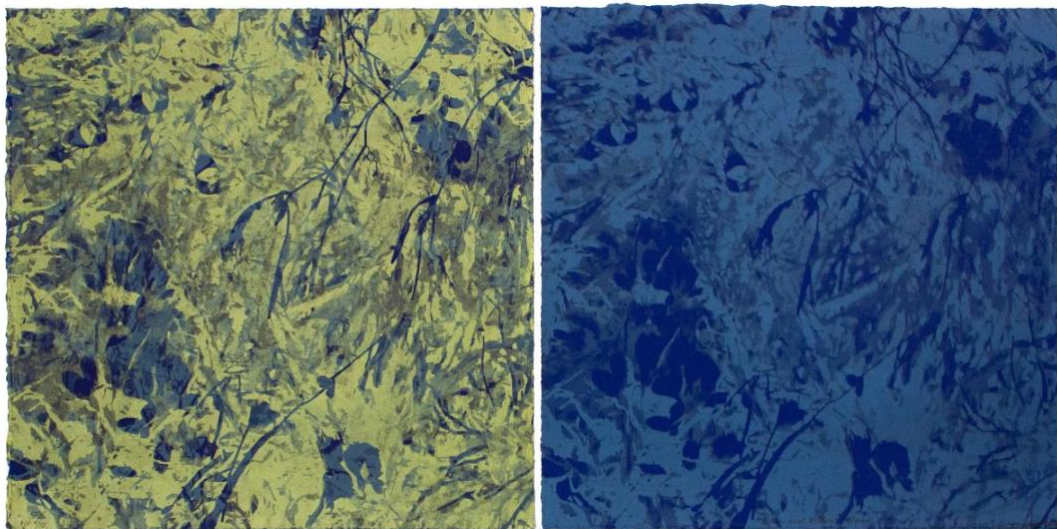
adds texture to the image—as we look closely, it also brings us into a communal space with the artist and her collaborators whose hands and labor animate the print, like Rachel Czarnik who worked with Salamé on the embroidery and Jacob Marrero who assisted with printmaking and the fabrication of the rainforest dress.

There is a mimetic mode in this collection that informs the curation by Amy Eva Raehse, as well as the art itself. Divided into three galleries, each room repeats Salamé's thematic foci—ocean, desert, and rainforest. The images recur with variations in tone and tint and the mediums serve as mirrors of the ecological riddle—see “A Mountain of Clothes in Blue,” “Fast Fashion in Black and Brown,” and “Fast Fashion in Color I.” And yet each piece offers its own response.

“Blue and Yellow Algae,” a silkscreen produced on Rives BFK paper, is luminous and richly lit from within. Salamé has reflected nature back to us as precious and refined. How will we transform and be transformed by what we are invited to behold?



Fast Fashion Atacama I, II, III, IV, 2025, archival print on canvas with hand embroidery Comprised of 4 panels, each 59 x 38 Inches



Blue and Yellow Algae, 2025, silkscreen on Rives BFK paper



A Mountain of Clothes in Blue, 2024, silkscreen on handmade paper, interference pigments



Installation view of *Camouflage* at Goya Contemporary Gallery, photo by Mitro Hood

“The beauty here is not empty or slight, but deeply ethical.”

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“Ocean,” a dress created with bioplastics mimes the colors of the rainforest, the transparency of clear water, and the sheen of bioplastic. Its surface shine harkens to the richness of silk, and like a placid lake, reflects the vegetation of the basin or plant life above it. But it is also dappled with organic and possibly inorganic pigmentation, particularly in the orange woven through the crocheted belt. We are reminded here of art’s debt to industrial materials which suggests that art itself, like our own bodies, are already infused with the synthetic and indestructible products of the Anthropocene.

Inorganic plastic is not just a ubiquitous and versatile product which is made into clothes and airplanes and medical technology. Marine life feed on it and it can be found in a new mother’s milk ducts. But as Salamé

demonstrates, plasticity is also a quality, amenable to ingenuous and local production from natural and organic materials. The bioplastic used in “Ocean” was cooked in the artist’s kitchen, with generous assistance from Maia Malakoff.

Beauty is a deeply embedded imperative here, a surfeit of pleasure for the eye that belies the near horror in miles of garbage in the earth’s oceans, deserts and rainforests. Like Salamé’s mylar prints of Venice which captured its vulnerability to rising sea levels, *Camouflage* renders beauty and material repurposing from the catastrophes of environmental degradation. The beauty here is not empty or slight, but deeply ethical, a slow product of intense labor and years of study and gestation.

“Rainforest,” a light-yellow vest of cotton woven from pineapple husks offers exquisite innovation and style with intimations of classical sculpture and poise. Placed alongside “Desert,” a ruched, floor length dress made from handmade flax paper and clay, humanity’s sartorial future was for me suddenly yoked to the past, when recycling was not an attempt to salvage our wanton and wasteful use of resources but a natural cycle of resourceful consumption, with our connection to nature intact, an awareness of our own creatureliness secure in our responsibility as stewards of the earth’s resources, not its predators. Salamé’s collaborator on the desert dress was Helen Frederick of Reading Road Studio.



Rainforest, 2025, pineapple husks, fabric, thread



Desert, 2024, handmade flax paper, clay, pelon



Atacama in Red, 2017, printing, laser cutting, embossing, embroidery



Camouflage, 2024, solar etching, silkscreen, chine collé, hand painting with 3D elements comprised of 12 panels, 22 x 30 inches each



Installation view of *Camouflage* at Goya Contemporary Gallery, photo by Mitro Hood

A 12-piece photographic print bears the title of the exhibition, “Camouflage.” It is displayed in a gallery dominated by the aura and coral tint of the desert. Transformed from photographs by a labor intensive and iterative process through solar etching, silkscreen, and hand painting, its tiered landscape suggests red-brown earth, blue sky, and a neutral terrain. The artist adds a textured 3-dimensionality using sculptured shapes created by chine-collé and fine Japanese paper.

Sit and do some “slow looking,” a term offered by the curator, Amy Eva Raehse. Inhabit the dresses in your mind’s eye. Engage your mimetic faculties. Salamé’s printed and bio-engineered textiles can be viewed as an offering—a curative, both for the earth itself and for us, the agents of its wounds and scars.

Like the innovators recycling the disposable clothes into yarn in the second part of the video, *Fast Fashion Recycled*, Salamé’s practice is an example of what is possible in the work of restoration, regeneration, and redemption. When it is done with Salamé’s collaborative ethos replete with models for how we might live differently, we are in the realm of the good, the common good.

***Camouflage* is on view April 12th through May 22nd, 2025 at Goya Contemporary.
Gallery Hours: Tues / Fri, 10:00 am – 6:00 pm and Saturdays, 12:00 pm – 4:00 pm**

The exhibit will be on view at Blaffer Art Museum in Houston, TX October 4, 2025- March 15, 2026.

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Header image: Ocean, 2024, bio plastics, bio algae, crochet, pigments, turmeric, indigo, spirulina. All images courtesy of Goya Contemporary.