

## SHORT BIO

Washington, DC-based artist Tamara Embrey has been making her own patterns and one-of-a-kind clothing for over 20 years. After earning her B.A. from Hofstra University, Ms. Embrey moved to New York City and began developing her art, primarily through painting and poetry. While pursuing these interests, she supported herself by working in design firms in New York City, and with freelance work for several New York-based galleries and for the Centre Pompidou in Paris. In 2004, she earned her Master of Fine Arts degree from the University of Oregon. Shortly thereafter she began making and selling her handmade garments professionally. In 2007, she moved to the DC Metropolitan area, and since 2008, she has been a resident artist at the Fiberworks Studio at The Torpedo Factory Art Center in Alexandria, Virginia.

## ARTIST'S STATEMENT

Aesthetically, I see my work as a conversation between seeming opposites: between hot and cool colors; between straight lines and curvy flounces; between whimsy and elegance and punk; between what people consider junk and what they consider art; and between the old and unwanted, and the renewed and wanted again.

### *Process*

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Since I work exclusively with repurposed materials, my process begins at my local thrift store. I spend countless hours scouring these stores for interesting vintage and “pre-loved” garments, primarily tops and sweaters. These garments start out as ordinary, sometimes even dowdy or unstylish sweaters or shirts, often with holes, stains, or some other sort of “flaw” that has prompted their donation. But I see their greater potential. An overwhelming floral print that makes for an unflattering sweater can easily make a lovely flounce on a skirt, jacket or scarf. As it is cut and transformed, the impression of the print changes, becomes less domineering, more abstract. Lately, I’ve been especially interested in introducing several different prints to each other, seeing how stripes and flowers and abstracts interact and play off one-another, both clashing with, then enhancing one another in new and surprising ways.

Instead of thinking of a design, then finding materials to express that idea, I consider the materials that I find and then let them lead me to where they will go. It’s a very Eastern way of working.

### *Technique*

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All of my works are made using the fabric draping technique. Instead of using patterns, I “sculpt” each piece of fabric on the dress-form before it gets sewn. I then sew the pieces together using a serger. Traditionally, sergers (or overlock machines) have been used to finish edges and seams that go on the inside of garments, stitches that are not meant to be seen. I turn this idea “inside out” and not only expose all of this sewing, but make it a

design feature. With these “exposed threads” I’m able to add color (with the choice of thread), texture (with the choice of stitch and tension on the thread), and embellishment (with the choice of where I place these lines of thread). In this way, the structural “sews” blend together with the “sews” that are embellishments, creating an overall surface design that is integrated and visually exciting.

### *Philosophy*

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I like that recycling fabric is good for the planet; I also like that these natural fibers are gorgeous to touch, and are able to live long lives. But what I really love about working with recycled materials is that the fiber has a “memory”. What I mean by that is, the fiber is able to “remember”, not just its former shape and function (as the sleeve of a sweater, a pocket, a collar...), but the fabric retains some of the personality and essence, not just of its former life as a sweater, but of the person who once wore—and perhaps loved—it. Add to this my own intervention and reshaping --a sleeve becomes the side of a skirt or a flounce on a jacket; a pocket becomes part of a hat or the petals of a flower—and you have layers of intentions...memories...meanings.