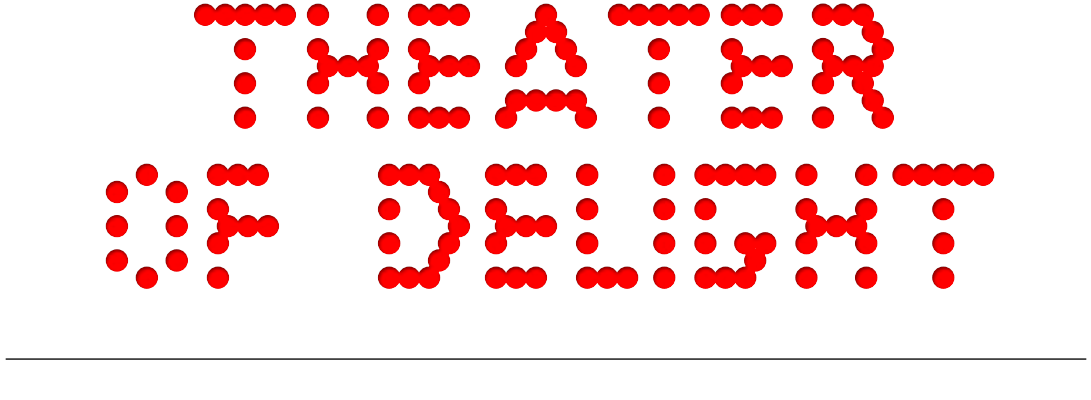




September 20th — November 20th 2025

Life often shifts unexpectedly—sometimes, if we’re lucky, just at the right moment, when the subconscious realizes too much energy has been invested in the wrong place. What began during a period of convalescence—when Sal Salandra, in his early forties, started stitching familiar, traditional motifs and left his daily job as a hairdresser—eventually transformed. After years of creating needlepoints of his dogs and other still lifes, his work took a sudden turn: his needle began to depict explicit scenes of gay and queer sex, engaging with the alchemical charge of erotic desire.

Today, Salandra’s thread paintings teem with BDSM rituals, Bacchanalian orgies, surreal fairy-tale landscapes, clichés from American TV culture, and veiled religious figures stepping onto an imagined stage. The adventurousness of his characters—provocative, and to some perhaps even unethical—offers more than simple provocation: it explores how erotic relations of power can be a source of happiness, joy, and ultimately, delight. His work fulfills fantasies of unapologetic yet mystical ecstasy and celebrates the will toward self-gratification. Sex, even when intentionally imbalanced, seemingly disordered, or bound by logics of submission and domination, is depicted with the sweetness of a loving refuge.

Theater of Delight is the first solo exhibition in Italy by Sal Salandra. For this second act at Camera Doppia, designer Fabio Zambernardi creates a site-specific display that hints at the artist’s landscape of layered and fragmented visual references and responds to the overarching theme of the exhibition. Drawing on autobiographical elements from Salandra’s life and work, Zambernardi brings to the stage of this theater of delight a scenography in which sexual pleasure mingles with the vernacular and the trivialities of everyday life.

The environment that Zambernardi assembles brings to the surface all this erotic tension—and more. It is meticulously crafted, yet its context and function remain only loosely suggested. Recalling the life Salandra lived before becoming an artist, Zambernardi fills the space of Camera Doppia with a series of highly charged props, each bearing an anonymous yet religious look. The sense of effortlessness that radiates from Salandra’s work—even though his thread paintings require hours of labor, precision, and, undeniably, a great deal of fun—is translated into the exhibition setting. Playfulness and sensuality get along very well in his hands, as they do in Zambernardi’s. In this context, Salandra’s characters become protagonists in a kind of storytelling that—like theater itself—moves in and out of what a hair salon and a darkroom are supposed to look like, drawing the viewer into an emotionally chaotic, yet formally precise and sophisticated mise-en-scène.

If it is the creative potential of hidden, turbulent sexuality that Salandra’s work explores, it does so through a kind of “strange” religiosity that permeates the scenes he depicts. It’s more than the Christian iconography, angelic symbols, or paradisiacal references that populate this theatrical world. Born in New Jersey to an Italian family, Salandra once studied to become a priest. Speaking about religion, he has openly shared his unease with the cycle of guilt, confession, and redemption imposed by the teachings of the Catholic Church. Pain and torture, for the believer, are often seen as the only paths to redemption. But when one realizes there is nothing to confess—nothing in sex to redeem—then the shift happens. Rather, Salandra’s paintings seem to suggest, one must recognize that the uncontainable pleasure that sex can offer is an experience of truth—one that is close to the divine.

Yet, a form of redemption still appears in Sal’s work—and it emerges through the specific act of needlepointing. Traditionally stereotyped as part of the female domestic sphere, in his thread paintings needlework becomes both a tool and a site of queer resistance. The repetitive, meditative quality of needlepoint lends it the air of a religious practice—something one must believe in and remain devoted to—just as Salandra is devoted to transforming the perception of pain into pleasure. In his paintings, ultimately, the sinners always become the gods.

EXHIBITED WORKS

- ①

Sal Salandra, *Animal House*, 2021 20 x 27 cm
- ②

Sal Salandra, *Present it*, 2023, 38.1 × 58.4 cm
- ③

Sal Salandra, *The Baptism*, 2025, 22.5 × 22 cm
- ④

Sal Salandra, *Go Go Boy*, 2023, 66.04 × 45.72 cm
- ⑤

Sal Salandra, *Anticipation*, 2022, 33.02 × 40.64 cm
- ⑥

Sal Salandra, *The Last Supper*, 2022, 60.96 × 81.28 cm
- ⑦

Sal Salandra, *Truck Stop*, 2025, 67.31 × 55.88 cm
- ⑧

Sal Salandra, *Self Portrait*, 1997, 27.3 × 28.3 cm
- ⑨

Sal Salandra, *Maggie*, 1995, 39 × 33.5 cm
- ⑩

Sal Salandra, *Lynn’s Dogs*, 2014, 33.5 × 28 cm
- ①

Sal Salandra, *Garter Boys*, 2022, 63 × 91.5 cm
- ②

Sal Salandra, *In the Closet*, 2022, 30.5 × 38.5 cm

- ①

A Video Subcontext to Theater of Delight: Broadcasts from an Imaginary Hair Salon Color mp4 video, loop (07:25 min)
Art direction by Fabio Zambernardi
Editing by Michelle Pan
Video installation by Matteo Tora Cellini

- ①

Fabio Zambernardi, *Delightful Bandanas*, 2025, ca. 50 × 50 cm
- ②

Fabio Zambernardi, *Spanker*, 2025, 28 × 13 cm

- ①

Ettore Sottsass, *Sedia Synthesis*, Olivetti, 1972
Courtesy Galleria Luisa Delle Piane

