



Breaking Rules

Intercultural Textile Art between Pakistan and Germany

Khawar Saleem & Thyra Holst | Artist Duo





Press Coverage

International media attention, including [Anbaaexpress.ma](https://anbaaexpress.ma) (Morocco, May 2025): *"Breaking Rules is an art project that revitalizes craftsmanship and cross-cultural fashion aesthetics... an extraordinary collaboration... an aesthetic manifesto with a humanitarian message."*

Upcoming Exhibitions

Breaking Rules has been selected for presentation at:

- UN Headquarters Vienna (Austria)
International Art Exhibition organized by ACCES, France
February 18-21, 2026
- Singapore
International presentation
April 24-26, 2026

Recent Presentations

NCA Triennale 2025 (National College of Arts, Lahore):

Breaking Rules was invited to present at the First International Conference on Theories in Art & Architecture (THiAA), celebrating the 150th anniversary of the National College of Arts. Our collaboration served as a living example of how traditional craftsmanship and contemporary art work together. We shared our authentic intercultural dialogue and our understanding of Breaking Rules as a counterweight to AI.

"Textile Bridges: How Pakistani-German Collaboration Transforms Traditional Aari Embroidery into Contemporary Wearable Art"
November 25, 2025

Watch the presentation: www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z4yFlyULowM



This presentation was featured in Egyptian television's New Year's program (2025) by Esmael Bakr, showcasing Breaking Rules alongside international artists' greetings:

<https://youtu.be/aCBtqFgN3WA?si=verylbeHyJSl2amk>

Exhibition Relevance for Curators

The textile art of Breaking Rules is excellently suited for thematic exhibitions on ethnic textiles, traditional embroidery, cultural dialogue, and contemporary craftsmanship. They create an authentic bridge between traditional Pakistani textile traditions and European art aesthetics – ideal for exhibitions on migration cultures, slow fashion, craft traditions, nature and climate change, or intercultural art projects.

Dialogue between Ancient Mastery and Modern Art

Breaking Rules is an intercultural textile art project by the German-Pakistani artist duo Khawar Saleem (Pakistan) and Thyra Holst (Germany). They combine 45 years of Pakistani craft tradition with contemporary European art aesthetics to create a new form of cultural dialogue through textile art.

Their works emerge through the fusion of traditional Pakistani tambour embroidery (Aari technique) with conceptual, modern art. Khawar Saleem brings decades of experience as coordinator and quality manager of the entire craft network – from embroidery to tailoring to weaving – and is a master of poetic color combinations and precise implementation through his craftsmen, while Thyra Holst translates perceptions and life values into clear structures, forms, and colors through artistic abstraction.

"He knows exactly how his clothing must be made – and I bring new perspectives into play." — Thyra Holst

"I have met many artists, but Thyra has really impressed me. Her view of form and expression is an enrichment." — Khawar Saleem

The first joint collection combines fine, hand-embroidered ornaments with modern design concepts based on traditional Pakistani cuts. A subtle tension emerges: classical rigor

meets experimental freedom. Unusual for traditional aesthetics: Deliberately asymmetrical line guidance brings surprises into play – they give the textile artworks movement, freshness, and individuality (Breaking Rules: breaking with the tradition of symmetrical Pakistani designs).

Technical Details: The Aari Technique

Traditional Pakistani tambour embroidery is executed with a hook-shaped tool and requires years of training. Khawar Saleem's craftsmen master both classical ornamentation and the patterns developed for Breaking Rules – an innovation that connects traditional skills with contemporary design concepts.

The Self-Portrait as Second Skin

The first dress emerged as the culmination of Thyra's series of abstract self-portraits, inspired by the exhibition "Faces of Us" – a project of her association kulturdialog e.V. promoting diversity and respect. Through this work, she understood: art develops the artist's personality and personality develops art. Every abstract artwork is a self-portrait.

Following Louise Bourgeois' philosophy that textile work can be as profound as any painting, Thyra chose to wear her self-portrait as wearable art. The series comprises four works: a study in acrylic with yarn and wire, a variation as sphere, one as explosion, and this dress. The explosion became the sun motif – its inner circle derived from traditional Pakistani design, with added rays. The asymmetrical arrangement deliberately breaks with Pakistani symmetrical traditions – hence "Breaking Rules."

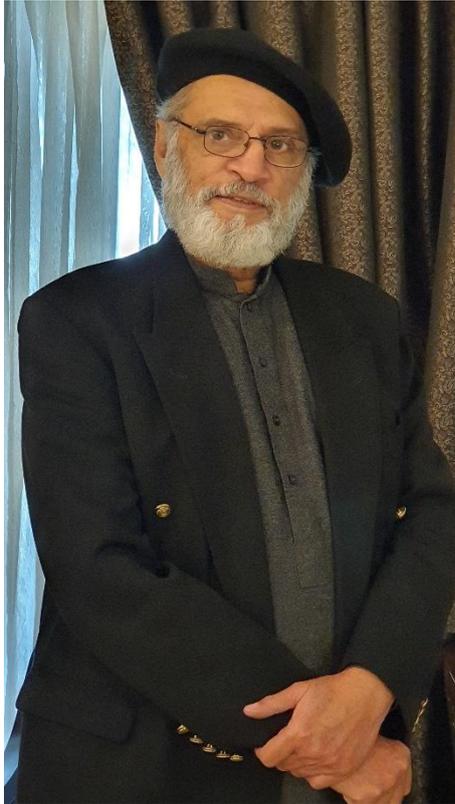
Sustainability through Craftsmanship

Breaking Rules stands for conscious deceleration against fast fashion. Each garment is created through weeks of handwork using high-quality natural materials and is designed for longevity – a direct counterpoint to the throwaway mentality of the fashion industry.

Fair Working Conditions as Principle

The project guarantees Pakistani craftsmen fair compensation and good working conditions. Through long-term collaboration, traditional skills are promoted and local jobs are secured.





About the Artists

Khawar Saleem (Pakistan)

Textile coordinator and quality manager with 45 years of experience in the Pakistani craft network. Orchestrates all production steps from traditional hand embroidery to tailoring and weaving. As an experienced coordinator, he leads craftsmen through complex production processes and is a master of harmonious color combinations – guaranteeing the highest quality standards in authentic Pakistani textile art.

Thyra Holst (Germany)

Multidisciplinary artist trained in ballet and modern dance (1990). Her dance background shapes her design process: movement, rhythm, and bodily perception create flowing, organic forms. Translates perceptions and life values into clear structures through artistic abstraction – a method learned from Italian artist Agostina Zwilling.

Thyra is the founder of kulturdialog e.V. with focus on intercultural understanding through artistic projects.



Collaboration & Philosophy

A textile artwork by Breaking Rules is the result of a genuine intercultural relationship. A new dress is designed and sketched by Thyra. Khawar discusses all details with her, develops modification suggestions, and finally coordinates the implementation of the prototype with his craft network.

This collaboration requires mutual trust, respect for different working methods, and values such as patience, devotion, and concentration on the essential. It thrives on collaboration beyond haste – characterized by calm, mindfulness, and inner clarity.

"He appreciates me as an artist and as a person. That's precisely why he's open to new design experiments – that makes our collaboration extraordinary." — Thyra Holst

Thyra's dance training is central to Breaking Rules' aesthetic. Movement and rhythm flow into every design, creating forms that feel alive rather than static. In video presentations, this becomes literal: Thyra performs in the Sun Dress (3-5 minutes), transforming the garment into a living second skin. This synthesis of textile art and performance distinguishes Breaking Rules from conventional fashion design.

Exhibition Potential & Themes

Their works appeal to curators seeking authentic cultural bridges and contemporary interpretations of traditional techniques.

Core Exhibition Themes:

- Art exhibitions
- Climate change
- Intercultural dialogue
- Pakistan
- Embroidery

Additional Exhibition Potentials:

- Textile art & craftsmanship (museums of applied arts)
- Migration & diaspora (intercultural collaboration as integration example)
- Women's art/gender (female perspectives in German-Pakistani cooperation)
- Globalization & local craftsmanship (tradition in global context)
- Contemporary textile art collections
- Museums focusing on non-European cultures
- Slow fashion & sustainability
- Traditional craft techniques
- Cultural dialogue & international understanding
- South Asian art & culture
- Fair trade & social responsibility

Ideal for institutions that address craftsmanship, migration, cultural identity, diversity, or sustainable textile production.

Breaking Rules preserves the soul of human creativity - the emotions, traditions, and authentic expressions that no algorithm can replicate.

We create video documentation of our work and presentations (such as our NCA Triennale 2025 presentation) for exhibition screenings and educational programs upon request.

Artistic Concepts

Materials & Techniques

- Tambour embroidery (Aari technique) from Pakistan under fair working conditions
- High-quality natural materials (silk, cotton-viscose, linen-viscose)
- Deliberate embroidery design as artistic rule-breaking
- Thematic diversity: first works nature-inspired (sun, leaves, roots), abstract life themes in preparation
- Subtle color palette with quiet sophistication

Thematic Focus

- Cultural dialogue between Europe and South Asia
- Preservation of craft traditions through reinterpretation
- Good working conditions and fair production
- Slow fashion as countermovement to mass production
- Interculturality as aesthetic manifesto

The first dress emerged as the culmination of Thyra's series of abstract self-portraits; further works will abstract nature themes.





Contact & Exhibition Inquiries:

We are happy to be available for curatorial conversations and exhibition inquiries.

Breaking Rules

Khawar Saleem & Thyra Holst

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