

# BREAKING RULES



Sun Dress

## Intercultural Textile Art

Pakistan & Germany

**Khawar Saleem & Thyra Holst**

in artistic partnership with Dr. Said Bouftass (Phenomorphology of the human body)

Wearable Art · Second Skin · Cultural Dialogue

Curators Information V8 | 04.2026



# Press Coverage

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."

# Recent Presentations

**NCA Lahore — THiAA Conference, November 25, 2025.** Thyra Holst presented BREAKING RULES at the First International Conference on Theories in Art & Architecture (THiAA), celebrating the 150th anniversary of the National College of Arts. And a 10 pages article has been accepted for publication in the NCA journal.

The presentation was also broadcast on Egyptian television as part of international New Year greetings. **Watch:** [www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z4yFlyULowM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z4yFlyULowM)

# Exhibitions

**UN Headquarters Vienna (Austria) · February 18–21, 2026**

International Art Exhibition organised by ACCES (France). Sun Dress presented.

**Singapore · April 24–26, 2026**

International presentation. Sun Dress and Leaves Dress presented.

# Exhibition Relevance for Curators

The textile art of BREAKING RULES is excellently suited for thematic exhibitions on intercultural dialogue, ethnic textiles, traditional embroidery, contemporary craftsmanship, slow fashion, sustainability, women's art, and the human response to AI dominance. Each work can be presented as original garment on mannequin, and as large-format photographic prints, or live performance.



# The Project



PHOTO: Khawar Saleem and Thyra Holst

**BREAKING RULES** is an intercultural textile art project by Khawar Saleem (Pakistan) and Thyra Holst (Germany), in artistic partnership with Dr. Said Bouftass (USA/Phenomorphology). It bridges 45 years of Pakistani craft mastery with European conceptual art methodology — positioning handcraft as a counterweight to AI dominance and fast fashion.

Each work exists on two levels: an abstract life theme and its textile embodiment. The garment is not a carrier of the concept — it is the concept made visible. Wearable art as second skin.

"In Thyra's work, I see perception translated into form — life values woven into textile."

— Dr. Said Bouftass

The collaboration bridges 7,000 kilometres between Overath (Germany) and Lahore (Pakistan). It thrives on mutual trust, cultural respect, and a shared conviction: art is communication, design is beauty.

## The Inch-Metre Moment

A key moment of intercultural transformation: Pakistan uses imperial measurements — a legacy of British colonial history. At first, Thyra measured in centimetres and converted to inches. The result: awkward, fractional numbers, difficult to communicate and to work with across distance and language.



Then something shifted. Thyra bought an inch measurement and began measuring directly in inches — and suddenly the numbers were clean: whole inches, half inches. Simple, precise, communicable. The body had learned to think in a new unit of measurement.

This is what genuine intercultural engagement looks like. Not translation — transformation. When you truly open yourself to another system of understanding, you begin to perceive differently. The inch-metre moment became a symbol of the entire project.

## The Collection — Three Works in two Layers

BREAKING RULES currently presents three completed works. Each work carries two names: the abstract life theme, and the garment that embodies it.



## Self-Portrait | Sun Dress

Black wild silk · Aari embroidery · Metal wire · Made to order · €500



Sun Dress

The Sun 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. 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 ornamental design, with added rays. The asymmetrical arrangement deliberately breaks with Pakistani symmetrical traditions — hence 'Breaking Rules.'

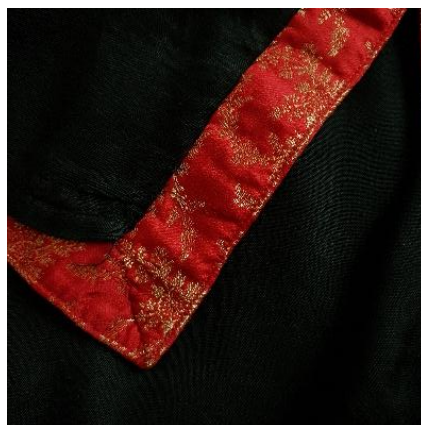
The Sun Dress is both wearable art and performance costume. Thyra performs in the dress on video, transforming the garment into a living second skin. This synthesis of textile art and performance distinguishes **BREAKING RULES** from conventional fashion design.

"Khawar 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



Sun Dress — detail embroidery



## Honestly Greenwashed | Leaves Dress

100% wool · 9-color hand-guided machine embroidery · Orange/rust front · Olive green back ·  
Ensemble: scarf (150 × 32 cm), bag (24 × 20 cm)



Honestly Greenwashed | Leaves Dress

Honestly Greenwashed | Leaves Dress is a radical critique of the fashion industry — and it exposes its own subject from within. The dress became what it set out to expose.

The original concept: the front would be plant-dyed in natural green (onion skins with iron sulphate), the back chemically dyed in rust orange — front beautiful, back the truth. A dress that



would wear the contradiction of Greenwashing on its body and expose it. Even in the original concept, the dress would have been an indictment.

But genuine plant dyeing proved impossible in Pakistan today. Traditional knowledge is lost — the older generation died, the younger never learned it. The plants are not available, the necessary minerals not sold, and the resources not justifiable in a country where people go hungry. Even with the best intentions and a master craftsman with 45 years of experience, the system does not allow genuinely sustainable production.

The result: both sides were chemically dyed — orange/rust at the front (the marketed promise), olive green at the back (what lies beneath). The dress IS greenwashed. And we tell the truth about it. That honesty is the artwork.





Honestly Greenwashed



Leaves Dress

A further layer of intercultural dialogue: Khawar originally sent round, symmetrical leaf motifs — the traditional Pakistani form. Thyra intervened: 'I cut the circles through, pull out an outer point — create triangles from the round motifs.' This geometric transformation astonished Khawar. The triangular leaf motifs now represent diversity: each one different, each one belonging.

"This dress was one of the greatest challenges of my life."

— Khawar Saleem



## Women's Power | Armour Dress

The third work is a tribute to strong women — represented in Pakistan by the artist and lecturer Prof. Salima Hashmi and in Germany by the dancer and choreographer Pina Bausch. Salima Hashmi — daughter of the Pakistani national poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz — is one of the most significant voices for art, freedom and human rights in Pakistan; she taught at NCA Lahore and is Khawar Saleem's mentor. Pina Bausch revolutionised expressive dance and created a body of work that inseparably connects body, emotion and social power — Thyra Holst has a personal connection to her through dance.



This tribute is no coincidence: Khawar Saleem has provided an excellent education for all his children — daughters and son alike; his daughters today contribute substantially to the family income, which in today's Pakistan is still rare but increasingly common. Dr. Said Bouftass (see section *About the Artists*), father of two daughters, shares this conviction. Thyra Holst also advocates for education and gender equality worldwide. The dress thus carries not only a theme, but a lived commitment shared by all three collaborators.



The front of the dress is embroidered in a flat, linear pattern covering the entire surface — using hand-guided machine embroidery and Aari embroidery by hand. The motifs in the chest area are modelled on arrowheads. Metal ornaments, also reminiscent of arrowheads, are distributed across the front, sleeves and upper back, giving the dress its armour-like presence. Shoulder pads emphasise the shoulders and speak the language of the powerful. Epaulettes complete the ensemble: armour as second skin, making posture visible.

The shoulder pad was initially a design decision for the dress itself — an impulse that emerged from conversation with Dr. Said Bouftass, who was working at the same time on the shoulder from the perspective of the Phenomorphology of the human body. The dress came first. Only afterwards did it unfold on the abstract level how shoulders speak: Thyra Holst developed her lecture *Anatomy & Fashion*, in which the shoulder stands as a universal sign of power and strength — from the knight's armour to Margaret Thatcher and Angela Merkel. The dress had already carried the thought before it was spoken.





## The Aari Technique



Craftsman working with Aari hook

Traditional Pakistani tambour embroidery is executed with a hook-shaped tool (the Aari hook) and requires years of training. The technique allows for extraordinary precision and density — creating surfaces of exceptional richness that cannot be replicated by machine.

Khawar Saleem's craftsmen master both classical ornamentation and the new patterns developed for BREAKING RULES. Each pattern represents an innovation: connecting centuries-old skills with contemporary design concepts. The deliberate asymmetry — a break with traditional Pakistani symmetry — is itself a technical challenge for craftsmen trained in perfect bilateral balance.

At handguided machine embroidery beyond four thread colours, embroidery time increases exponentially. This fact reflects the true cost of handcraft — a cost fast fashion has made invisible.



# Theoretical Work

**BREAKING RULES** is not only an artistic practice — it is also a subject of theoretical reflection. The following paper documents the methodology, conceptual framework, and artistic results of the project.

## **BREAKING RULES:**

When Traditional Pakistani Embroidery Meets Contemporary European Art

How intercultural creativity emerges when two worlds meet as equals

**Author:** Thyra Holst & Khawar Saleem

**Presented at:** THiAA — First International Conference on Theories in Art & Architecture, National College of Arts (NCA) Lahore, November 25, 2025

**Status:** Accepted for publication in the NCA journal · Available on [www.thyraholst.de/Breaking-Rules/](http://www.thyraholst.de/Breaking-Rules/) after NCA first publication

**Reviewed by:** Dr. Said Bouftass (Phenomorphology)

## Core themes of the paper:

### **Phenomenological perception as artistic method**

How Thyra translates lived experience into textile structure — grounded in Dr. Said Bouftass's Phenomorphology and Agostina Zwilling's practical methodology.

### **Tacit knowledge and craft mastery**

Khawar's 45 years of experience as embodied knowledge — what the craft research tradition calls tacit knowledge (Polanyi, 1966). His knowledge cannot be separated from his hands, his eye, his judgment.

### **Tawakkul — trust in the process**

Khawar's Islamic principle of trusting in God and the unfolding process as an artistic resource. Unexpected deviations are not failure — they are part of the way. No dress ever becomes exactly as planned. The strongest artistic decisions often emerge from the unplanned.

### **Art is communication. Design is beauty**

**BREAKING RULES'** foundational distinction. Each garment is simultaneously an artistic statement and an example of high-quality craftsmanship — the handwork is the language, the dress is the text.

### **Handcraft as counterweight to AI**

The paper argues that **BREAKING RULES** preserves what no algorithm can replicate: the emotions, traditions, and authentic expressions of human creativity. The Aari technique — requiring years of training, irreplaceable by machine — embodies this argument.

### **The Gamechanger: The Inch-Tape**

Documented as a key methodological insight — the shift from metric to imperial measurement as a metaphor for genuine intercultural transformation.

"The study of Morphology of the Human Body goes beyond the understanding of forms and movements. It is a philosophical experience that questions the meaning of the body in the context of reality."

— Dr. Said Bouftass (Bouftass, 2014)



# Collaboration & Philosophy

A textile artwork by **BREAKING RULES** is the result of a genuine intercultural relationship. A new work begins with Thyra's concept — developed through phenomenological perception, translating life values and abstract themes into structures, forms, and colours. It is discussed and developed with Said. Khawar receives the concept, discusses all details, develops modification suggestions from his deep knowledge of Pakistani craft tradition, and coordinates implementation with his craft network.

This is not a division between concept and execution. Khawar's responses shape the work as much as Thyra's initial vision. The reversed colours of Honestly Greenwashed, the triangular leaf motifs born from round originals — these are not accidents. They are the collaboration itself, made visible.

The artistic partnership with Dr. Said Bouftass (Phenomorphology — merging morphology and phenomenology) informs the conceptual framework: the belief that form carries meaning, that perception can be translated into structure, that textile art can embody philosophical inquiry.

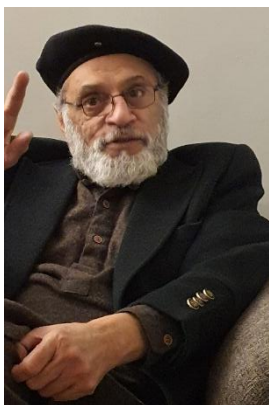
Khawar's approach is characterised by Tawakkul — Islamic trust in the unfolding of process. Thyra's by phenomenological abstraction developed with Italian artist Agostina Zwilling. Said brings further impulses from his rich background in morphology and philosophy — Phenomorphology as a living dialogue within the project. These three modes of attention — one rooted in faith, one in philosophical method, one in the morphology of the human body — find unexpected common ground in the act of making.

"Khawar appreciates me as an artist and as a person. That is precisely why he is open to new design experiments — that makes our collaboration extraordinary."

— Thyra Holst



# About the Artists



## Khawar Saleem (Pakistan, Lahore)

Master craftsman and textile coordinator with 45 years of experience in the Pakistani craft network. Orchestrates all production steps — from traditional hand embroidery (Aari/tambour technique) to tailoring and handweaving. Expert in traditional Pakistani bridal wear and a master of poetic colour combinations. Studied at NCA Lahore (1970). Guarantees the highest quality standards in authentic Pakistani textile art.



## Thyra Holst (Germany, Overath / Cologne)

Multidisciplinary artist trained in ballet and modern dance in the lineage of Mary Wigman. Her dance background shapes her design process: movement, rhythm, and bodily perception create flowing, organic forms. Translates phenomenological perception and life values into clear structures through artistic abstraction — a method developed with Italian artist Agostina Zwillling.

Lectures on Anatomy & Fashion (with Dr. Said Bouftass): Faculté de Médecine et de Pharmacie de Casablanca (FMPC), Université Hassan II, and Université Mohammed VI des Sciences et de la Santé (UM6SS), Casablanca, Morocco, May 2026.

Founder of kulturdialog e.V. Member of ETN, BBK, GEDOK Köln.

## Dr. Said Bouftass (USA) — Artistic Partnership

American fine artist and founder of Phenomorphology of the Human Body — merging morphology and phenomenology. Reviewer of the **BREAKING RULES** NCA conference paper. His theoretical framework enriches the conceptual methodology of **BREAKING RULES**: the translation of perception into form, of life values into textile structure.



# Fair Production

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

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

Honestly Greenwashed adds a further dimension: radical transparency about the limits of sustainability. When genuine ecological production proved impossible, **BREAKING RULES** chose honesty — and made that honesty the artwork itself.

**BREAKING RULES** preserves the soul of human creativity — the emotions, traditions, and authentic expressions that no algorithm can replicate.

# Exhibition Themes for Curators

**Core themes:** Intercultural dialogue · Textile art & embroidery · Pakistan & South Asian culture · Women's art & female strength · Slow fashion & sustainability · Craft traditions & contemporary reinterpretation · Anatomy & Fashion

**Additional contexts:** Migration & diaspora · Climate change & ecological limits · Globalization & local craftsmanship · Fair trade & social responsibility · Wearable art & performance · AI dominance & the human hand

Ideal for museums of applied arts, institutions addressing cultural identity and diversity, contemporary textile art collections, and exhibitions on sustainable textile production.



# Contact & Exhibition Inquiries

We welcome curatorial conversations and exhibition inquiries.

## **BREAKING RULES**

Khawar Saleem & Thyra Holst

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## **Artistic Partnership**

Dr. Said Bouftass — Phenomorphology of the human body

[www.phenomorphologyllc.com](http://www.phenomorphologyllc.com)

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