



Thread, Pin, and Sacred Geometry: Aisha Khalid's Spatial Installations and the Politics of Feminine Heritage

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ARTICLE INFO

Received:

May 28, 2026

Revision Received:

July 10, 2026

Accepted:

July 11, 2026

Available Online:

July 12, 2026

Keywords:

metamodernism,
postmodernism,
oscillation,
contemporary art,
reflexivity.

ABSTRACT

Pakistan-based artist Aisha Khalid is a National College of Arts (NCA) Lahore-trained professional miniature painter. For over two decades, she has developed a unique practice, moving between the scale of miniature painting and the scale of large site-specific pin, thread and velvet installations. Through the lens of the art-historical categories of metamodernism and feminist art history, the paper seeks to explore Khalid's two large, contemporary site-specific art installations: *Two Worlds as One* (2013) and *Your Way Begins on the Other Side* (2018). The paper argues that Khalid's installations constitute a form of metamodern constructive pastiche in which South Asian feminine craft traditions such as henna ornamentation, domestic textile making and Islamic sacred geometry are assembled into new architectural configurations that celebrate the correspondences, ambiguities and complexities of South Asian feminine cultural heritage but also render visible the material conditions - restraint, labor, potential harm - that that heritage conceals. Drawing on Vermeulen and van den Akker's (2010) notion of metamodern oscillation, Gibbons' (2017) notion of metamodern affect, and feminist scholarship on craft, labor and spatial experience, the paper argues that Khalid's work represents a meaningful but underexplored contribution to both feminist spatial art and to the study of metamodernism in non-Western contexts. It allows for a close reading of the treatment of normcore, the meta-cute, reflexivity, the double frame narrative and maximalism as metamodern aesthetics that has not yet been systematically brought to bear on the artist's practice, and, in particular, the comparative reading of *I Am* and *I Am Not* within the wider evolution of Khalid's metamodern aesthetic practice.

1. Introduction

The relationship of feminine craft traditions to fine art has been a key focus of feminist art-historical studies since the 1970s (Parker & Pollock, 1981). In South Asia, traditions of henna, textile weaving, embroideries and domestic handicrafts have been articulated as sites of cultural celebration and represented knowledge, but also (as feminist theorists have argued) as disciplinary activities which shape, adorn and constrain the bodies of women (Ahmed 1992). As a result, contemporary Pakistani artists working in and with these traditions are up against, what is by all accounts, genuinely difficult critical terrain. While the aestheticization of the disciplinary can take the practice away from its local context, critique and oppositionality also risk cultural self-colonization born from the adoption of Western feminist models. We see that celebration in its purest form is not enough; we see that critique in its purest form is not enough. What we need is a complex critical apparatus to hold the celebration and the critique together, the affirmation and the interrogation, in dynamic tension.

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Aisha Khalid (born 1969 Lahore) studied miniature painting at the National College of Arts, Lahore, where she is now full-time faculty and is one of the leading figures of the neo-miniature movement. She had exhibited at some of the most prestigious museums in the world, including the Tate Modern, Victoria and Albert Museum, Guggenheim Bilbao, Museum of Modern Art New York, Sharjah Biennial and most recently the Islamic Arts Biennale 2025. She has won a number of international prizes, and is included in the collections of numerous institutions. Her work consistently focuses on the intersection of feminine cultural heritage, gender politics, diaspora, and visual languages of ornament and beauty, employing these motifs in both positive and critical ways in her approach to the decorative arts of South Asia.

Khalid's spatial installations can be understood as an instance of a metamodern constructive pastiche of South Asian feminine tradition. The term constructive pastiche, introduced by Vermeulen and van den Akker (2010), and adapted to metamodernism by theorists Gibbons (2017) and Vittorini (2017), describes the quite different attitude of new sincerity towards inherited forms as compared to the postmodern pastiche. Whereas postmodern pastiche uses inherited forms ironically, as a way of acknowledging the impossibility of a categorical originality, the metamodern constructive pastiche recycles forms sincerely for new purposes, neither nostalgically revering them, nor cynically parodizing them. This frame, it is argued, allows for a better understanding of the critical and affective complexity of Khalid's installations.

In section 2, the paper develops a theoretical frame grounded in metamodern theory, feminist spatial theory and the theory of metamodern affect. Sections 3 and 4 describe and analyze *Two Worlds as One* (2013) and *Your Way Begins on the Other Side* (2018), respectively, through the metamodern analytical lenses of oscillation, double frame narrative, normcore, meta-cute, reflexivity, and maximalism. A fifth and final section briefly locates the installations within Khalid's larger practice through a comparative analysis with another pair of artworks, *I Am* and *I Am Not*. Section 6 places Khalid's work in a feminist spatial art and metamodernism context with attention to the non-Western. Section 7 concludes.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Metamodern Constructive Pastiche

Metamodernism (Vermeulen & van den Akker, 2010) has recently been used to describe a cultural sensibility oscillating between modernist sincerity and postmodern irony. Instead of dialectically reconciling modernism and postmodernism into a false synthesis (i.e., in naive idealism, or cynical disillusion), metamodernism holds them together in constant tension. Metamodernism has also been applied to the analysis of literature (James & Seshagiri, 2013), film (Kunze, 2014), and visual art (Hashim & Puadi, 2018), and one scholar (Gibbons, 2017) built upon the discursive approach to include the affective and ethical register of metamodern cultural production. A second sub-dimension is constructive pastiche, which involves reworking inherited forms and styles to articulate contemporary concerns. Whereas postmodern pastiche, to use Jameson's (1991) term, is a 'blank' or accidental practice of stylistic imitation, metamodern pastiche as a form can have a more sincere quality. The metamodern reconstruction employs vocabularies that were inherited from earlier times to discuss contemporary concerns that they were not originally designed to articulate, without weakening the integrity of the inherited form or the purpose to which it is used (Vittorini, 2017). This means that Khalid uses the formal logic of henna pattern-making, Islamic geometric tile work, and the technical mastery of the miniature tradition to create works that have contemporary relevance on issues of gender, diaspora, and cultural identity.

2.2. Feminist Spatial Theory

Feminist spatial theory proposes another way to understand these issues and builds on the idea that space is itself gendered. Scholars such as Grosz (1994) and Ahmed (2006) provide this perspective. It is never gender neutral but always gendered: it encodes social ideas and norms about whose bodies belong in what places, which labor is valuable, and which traditions are artistically elevated as art over craft. In this way, Khalid's installations take South Asian feminine traditions out of the domestic spaces to which they are generally relegated, and install them in the spaces of high art institutions - the gallery, the museum, the biennial - enacting spatial politics as well as aesthetic politics. They insist that what happens in the spaces of feminine domestic labor and cultural practice is worthy of the serious attention of the contemporary art world. As Ahmed (2006) has argued, the spatialization of bodies - whose bodies are oriented toward which spaces, and under what conditions of possibility - is a fundamental dimension of the social production of gender. In other words, Khalid's installations participate in the re-orientation of South Asian feminine cultural production to the high art institution, showing their right to exist in there not as decorative objects but as fine art.

2.3. Metamodern Affect and the Politics of Beauty

Gibbons (2017) has argued that metamodern cultural production is defined not just by this oscillatory structure but also by a specific form of affect: a genuine but not naive emotional commitment not foreclosing critical awareness. This account of metamodern affect is particularly relevant for Khalid, whose practice regularly deploys beauty (the beauty of henna pattern, the beauty of Islamic geometric ornament, the beauty of shimmering thread) as an affective vehicle of political and critical engagement. Importantly, the beauty of Khalid's installations is intended seriously and works precisely because it generates this affective proximity, and leaves room for critique beyond it. This is the metamodern core of her aesthetic strategy: maintaining an aesthetic of beauty and pleasure, while simultaneously (and of course seriously) aiming for critique and critical distance. Neither the beauty nor the critique is sacrificed, nor is either softened into the other: both are sustained at their full strength within the viewer's engagement with the artwork to the full, and this, according to Gibbons (2017), is what makes metamodern art what it is: the 'affective depth' that allows intense emotional engagement alongside critical observation.

3. Two Worlds as One (2013)

3.1 Visual Description/ Contextual Overview

Two Worlds as One filled the cement silos of a derelict industrial building in Sharjah during Art Week 2013, with 50,000 steel pins attached to black velvet panels lining the walls of the silo. The pins are arranged in a pattern resembling a woman's henna-covered hand. The henna pattern, usually small, intimate, personal and associated with celebration of feminine life events (wedding day, festivals, birth) is blown up to fill a giant, industrial, interior space. At a distance, the work looks like a large geometric-floral composition with an ornamental beauty inspired by the tradition of henna tattooing and the celestial geometry of Islamic sacred architecture. But when seen up close, the 50,000 sharpened steel pins can be seen, which are dangerous to approach and uncomfortable.

In that moment, the site is not just an abandoned industrial building in Sharjah, one of the cities of the Gulf that combines the wealth and flow of labor from South Asia, but a site with a particular history and cultural meaning. Because the thousands of South Asian migrants who build and maintain the cities of the Gulf are overwhelmingly male, while the domestic and caring work that sustains their households is overwhelmingly female, Khalid has spatially framed an industrial space of South Asian male labor with a work of South Asian feminine cultural heritage: henna ornamentation. This creates a spatial argument for the gendering of labor and for the domestic and cultural invisibility of that labor in the Gulf migration political economy.

3.2. Oscillation: Beauty and the Threat

In this oscillation of the aesthetic and the material, the jubilation and the restraint that are always already at play in the traditions that Khalid playfully renegotiates, Two Worlds as One becomes a way of not only presenting henna as ornament in South Asian feminine culture but of showing that this ornament was not only a normally accepted site of jubilation and community but also a means of inscription, making the female body available to the visibility of social performance, as a bride performing femininity defined by patriarchal culture. The utility of the pattern as a means of social control will be concealed by its ornamental appearance precisely because its beauty makes us forget what it is really doing. By applying the henna decoration in steel pins, Khalid makes the body of ornament concrete, for beauty is real, and so is danger; both inhabit the surface at the same time (Parker & Pollock, 1981). Crucially, Khalid does not simply critique the henna tradition, and its role in disciplining women, as a postmodern act of demystification. She does not, conversely, celebrate the tradition as a naive act of idealization. Instead, she sets up both of these reactions (the beauty and the threat, the celebration and the critique) within the same installation. This oscillation between opposing meanings, which Vermeulen and van den Akker (2010) describe as the defining characteristic of a metamodern artwork, forms a fundamental part of the ontology of the metamodern.

3.3. Double Frame Narrative

One of the most structurally obvious examples of metamodernism in the Two Worlds as One anthology is its use of double frame narrative. As Gibbons (2017) defines it, a double frame narrative is a structural strategy in which two incompatible readings of the same visual or spatial material are made simultaneously available, requiring the viewer to move between them rather than settling in either. In the first frame of Two Worlds as One, gallery viewing distance, the ornamental henna pattern in its geometric-floral complexity presents the work as a site of cultural celebration and feminine artistic heritage. The viewer is positioned as appreciating the beauty, cultural tradition, and warmth of the familiar ornamental vocabulary of South Asian femininity.

The second frame is activated when the slow realization that the decorative skin of 50,000 steel pins is something that does not celebrate, but rather threatens (the retracting of clothing, marking the skin) is a counterpoint to the first frame, without negating it. The beauty of the first frame is experienced from a distance, while the threat of the second frame is only visible as one approaches. Neither frame can exist without the other: you cannot look at the ornamentation in the surface of the work without knowing that it is made from thousands of pins, and you cannot look at the installation without seeing both the beauty of the henna and the threat of the pins. This unresolvable double reading, beauty and threat, celebration and critique, is the installation's metamodern double frame narrative at its most formally precise and politically serious.

3.4. Normcore Dimension: Steel Pins as Everyday Material

Two Worlds as One also draws from the normcore ethos, as the source text reads, Steel pins - ubiquitous domestic sewing and dressmaking supplies - are among the most banal and overlooked commonplace objects in and out of the home. If these basic kitchen utensils are ubiquitous enough to be found in most households, they are generally regarded as functional objects deserving of no special attention. By making them the central material of a massive international exhibition installation, Khalid performs the characteristic metamodern normcore gesture of elevating the ordinary to the level of the meaningful not through ironic appropriation but through sustained, devotional attention. The eventual 50,000 pins required to finish the works represent, through their reuse and sheer quantity, the normcore aesthetic of meaning through accumulation, the extraordinary result of ordinary acts repeated in sufficient numbers.

This is where normcore enters into the feminist politics of the work, as the labor of sewing, stitching, and pinning, the labor that pins perform and enable, is among the most systematically devalued of human labors. As the primary labor community for social reproduction, ubiquitous and routinely discounted in the accounting of economic and cultural value, the pin's elevation to the status of a primary artistic medium by Khalid implicitly argues for the affirmation of the cultural and aesthetic value of domestic feminine labor. This is, in itself, a metamodern argument, one that combines the sincere cultural affirmation in which it originates with the critique of circumstances under which it becomes devalued. The normcore status of the pin is not ironic: it retains its cultural and political power precisely because it is taken seriously, not ironized.

3.5. Meta-Cute and Reflexivity

The meta-cute aspect of Two Worlds as One is enacted, literally at arms length, in the inviting appearance of the henna pattern as a decorative whole, and more abstractly in its forms, including the geometric florals of the henna, the black velvet background of the cloth, and the shine of the pins. Together these forms signify not just the decorative, but specifically the feminine and the celebratory. At this viewing distance they present a metacut entry point for the work, providing a feeling of something pleasurable that draws the viewer in before the violence signified by the pins is seen up close. The metacut surface is no trick, no deception. The discovery that complicates the metacut surface does not (cannot) destroy or negate the warmth, but rather complicates the warmth in the very metamodern affective dynamic that sensation articulates. The warmth and the unease mix in coexistence, unassuming and firm, and the metamodern metacut surface emerges.

Another reflexive site of the installation is its self-consciousness about being situated within and engaging with the global South Asian art circuit. Two Worlds as One was developed for the Gulf art context, and specifically for Sharjah Art Week, an institution which is itself further embedded in the political economy of Gulf development and the South Asian labor migration it responds to. The installation knows it is also part of the cultural economy it critiques, not just as the critique of the condition of South Asian migrant workers, but as the building and maintenance of the cultural institutions of migrant workers. Its reflexivity is not a retreat from its critique, but an intensification of it, modeling itself on the ethical and reflexive engagement that Vermeulen and van den Akker (2010) identify as characteristic of metamodern cultural production.

3.6. Maximalism and Cosmic Scale

The maximalist nature of Two Worlds as One is more readily apparent in the 50,000 steel pins that cover the interior walls of the Sharjah silo, creating a surface of near-infinite complexity that simultaneously references the domestic scale of the individual pin and the cosmic scale of the celestial geometry the pattern evokes. This maximalism of quantity is characteristic of what Gibbons (2017) has termed metamodern political art, the use of overwhelming scale and material density to register the overwhelming scale of social and political realities that resist adequate individual representation.

This cosmic aspect of the geometric extension of the henna pattern, its allusion to the Islamic celestial geometry, to star fields, and to the order of the universe, transforms the maximalism of the 50,000 pins into a cosmological gesture, the pins covering the wall as a universe. While I have thus far deployed Khalid's maximalism as a proposition of excess, it is also a proposition of

ambition. Khalid's maximum density is the maximum scale of her subject matter: the relationship between the personal (the henna'd South Asian woman's hand) and the cosmic (the geometry of the skies as that appears in the Islamic visual tradition). By the same token, the installation's scale of maximum ambition is a challenge to its spatialized version, and therefore the maximum scale of the maximum ambition 4. *Your Way Begins on the Other Side* (2018).

4. Analysis Results

4.1. Visual Description

Your Way Begins on the Other Side is a site-specific installation: a giant dark room filled with threads and nets hanging from the ceiling, creating semi-transparent golden and vermilion arches that cast detailed patterns of light and shadow on the walls and the floor of the room. The viewer is directly engaged with the work by physically passing through the arc structures, thus inviting the viewer to enter the work in a spatial, corporeal sense rather than simply acting as an external viewer. The title is drawn from a proverb of the Sufi poet Rumi, which inverts the idea of the threshold as separator to that of spiritual passage to another state. The installation relies on multiple visual sources: the linear geometry of the henna tattoo and of portals and gateways of Mughal architecture, and the translucent luminescence of thread as a material of feminine domestic labor, and of celestial luminosity.

4.2. Threshold as Metamodern Device

The threshold - the arch that the viewer crosses through - becomes the defining metamodern structure in the film. Spatially the threshold is both the material location of the viewer, and a metaphor for the metamodern condition of in-between-ness. According to Vermeulen and van den Akker (2010), metamodern sensibility is the space of neither-nor, arrived or departed, always between, never either. The viewer who traverses one of the arch structures of *Your Way Begins on the Other Side* does not move from one settled state to another but enters and remains within the condition of passage. The 'other side' to which the title refers is always ahead, never fully reached. The installation makes this condition spatial and represented, rather than logical or mental. It demands that you enact such passage through the vibrating arch structures.

This spatial manifestation of the metamodern in-between is a resonance of the social and cultural space of what is on show. For Pakistani women traversing gendered, classed and diasporic borders in their everyday lives, 'on the way to the other side' is not a transitional moment, but rather a permanent condition on the landscape of life. Greater freedom, greater belonging, greater possibility is always ahead, always approached, never fully arrived at. The work makes this social condition visible and concrete by requiring the viewer to inhabit it spatially (i.e., to enter the work without arriving, to be in motion without a destination). This is the metamodern both/and in its most spatially advanced form.

4.3. Oscillation: Material and Sacred

In the tension between the quotidian and the mystical, the domestic and the cosmic, the banal and the transcendent, lies *Your Way Begins on the Other Side*. Thread and net are the most quotidian building blocks of domestic and industrial *kathun*, yet the spatial universe of the web is one of beauty, spiritual evocativeness, and cosmic dimensionality. Their geometric patterns recall the tile patterns, the screens and the worked plaster of Islamic sacred architecture, while the scintillating quality of the threads recalls cloth and light, the material and optical elements that figured so prominently in domestic feminine display and the immaterial play of divine light in the otherworld.

This oscillation between the material and the sacred is not a contradiction, but the crux of the installation: the most transcendent experiences of beauty, spiritual aspiration, and cultural belonging emerge from the most ordinary of material practices: sewing, threading, constructing. The installation defends the spiritual aspects of feminine domestic labor. It does not romanticize nor deny the conditions of constraint in which this labor is performed. This is the metamodern both/and of Khalid's practice: both beauty and labor, both transcendence and constraint, held in permanent tension within the same spatial experience (Gibbons, 2017).

4.4. Double Frame Narrative: Sacred Space and Social Faultlines

In contrast to the double frame narrative of *Your Way Begins on the Other Side*, where the layout of the gallery structure activates the double frame narrative, in *Two Worlds as One*, the second frame narrative is activated by proximity: it becomes visible as the viewer approaches the surface of the copper plate. In *Your Way Begins on the Other Side*, the double frame is only

active if the viewer knows the cultural and political references, for the person who is knowledgeable simultaneously occupies the spiritual beauty of the imagery of the first frame and its critique of society in the second.

The first frame is the transcendent, spiritual experience of the installation itself: the golden threads glistening, the geometry of the arch, the light and shadow. The physical configuration of the work enacts a sensuous space of beauty and spirituality, which might be experienced by anyone who has access to the space, regardless of their cultural background: everyone can appreciate that beauty. The installation also encodes, as another frame of reference, the social faultlines of the diaspora and of the gendering and classing of the lives of the Pakistani women whose cultural contexts the installation references. The second faultline is not intelligible to those without the background knowledge, though it adds further layers of meaning to the first. Here, the spiritual beauty of the work becomes a statement about the social conditions in which that spiritual aspiration is formed and constrained (Ahmed, 2006).

4.5. Sufi Dimensions and Ironesty

Including Rumi in the title adds a Sufi element to this metamodern reading. Sufism, the Islamic tradition of devotional music, meditation, and the ascetic disciplines of the body, is the original instance of the reconciliation of earnestness and irony: the attempt to realize the divine, while knowing that it is never fully achieved. In its ecstatic ardor, Sufi devotion writhes between faith and hopelessness. Both Sufism and metamodernism are best understood through the Sufi spirituality of *fana*, or the annihilation of the self in the pursuit of unity with the divine: neither there nor not there, neither complete nor abandoned, but always in between.

The ironesty of *Your Way Begins on the Other Side* is exactly this Sufi space. It promises what it names - 'way' as a path, as direction, as a place of arrival. Yet the very nature of this architecture renders such arrival impossible. For one walks along and beneath these arches, yet never reaches the other side, nor leaves this place, never arrives anywhere other than the passage. This is not mere corporate cynicism about the impossibility to transcend; it is an irony to express the Sufi-inspired idea that the path towards the divine is meaningful, not its destination. The ironesty, irony and sincerity for their true spiritual and cultural importance, is one of the finest tuned in contemporary Pakistani art (Vermeulen & van den Akker, 2010).

4.6. Maximalism of Thread and Scale

The construction in *Your Way Begins on the Other Side* can be understood as maximalist in the sense that the large thread and net installation fills the darkened room to an extent that viewers were surrounded on each side and on the ceiling. The projections allowed the visual extension of the installation to be multiplied geometrically and the projection space to be perceived as extending well beyond the dimensions of the room. Such what Gibbons (2017) has described as the maximalism of spatial immersion, the creation of a total environment that envelops the viewer, is a characteristic strategy of metamodern spatial art that exploits the maximalist scale of the spatial environment to create a corresponding maximal affective and intellectual experience.

This maximalism, however, is devotional in its excess. The months of threading, stitching, and constructing *Your Way Begins on the Other Side* into wall-to-wall installation are related to the *dhikr* (repetition and invocation) and *sama* (listening and movement) of Sufism, of which the little epigraph from Rumi in this installation is another example. In this sense, this excess of labor is also a spiritual gesture. The maximalism of the making mirrors the maximalism of the aspiration, and the overwhelming quantity of hand-placed threads performs the overwhelming desire for transcendence that the Sufi references of the installation articulate. This devotional maximalism, the use of material excess in the service of spiritual aspiration as opposed to decorative abundance, is a distinctively Pakistani metamodern aesthetic strategy.

4.7. Comparative Reading: I Am and I Am Not

To put these two installation pieces into the greater narrative of Khalid's metamodernism, a few words of comparison with her two-volume *I Am and I Am Not* series are helpful. This body of work consists of a series of small paintings, photographs and textile pieces created over the span of a decade. Many of the same themes related to her spatial installations are present: gender, identity, belonging, the politics of feminine visibility and invisibility. Yet, the tradition of miniature painting is an intimate counterpoint to the spatiality of monumental, site-specific sculpture and installation.

The images of *I Am* and *I Am Not* are described as a metamodern constructive pastiche, operating at the level of the image rather than the space. Khalid uses the visual vocabulary of the South Asian miniature painting tradition (its floral ornamentation, draftsmanship and layered symbolism) to create works that both affirm and interrogate the tradition. The

linguistic vacillation between the affirmation of and the negation of identity conveyed by the title *I Am* and *I Am Not* enacts at the level of language the double inhabitation that is performed by the installations at the level of space. Identity is not fixed, nor is it dissolved in the ambiguity of its oscillation at the point defined at the level of cultural sensibility by cultural theorists as characteristic of the metamodern sensibility (Vermeulen & van den Akker, 2010).

In both *I Am* and *I Am Not* and the two spatial works, Khalid's metamodern tactic applies across these different formats, from the scale of the miniature painting to the scale of the pin and thread installation, by piecing together and recomposing culturally amassed categories of labor that intervene in the fabric of inherited South Asian feminine cultural practices (such as miniature painting, henna ornament, Islamic geometry), while simultaneously honoring and questioning those same culturally amassed categories of labor. The metamodern constructive pastiche that traverses the full field of Khalid's practice is thus not a tendency, but a deeper structural logic or commitment that consistently permeates every medium and scale that she works in. It is this (figurative, narrative, discursive) consistency that makes her practice a coherent and consequential instance of the larger metamodern cultural formation in contemporary Pakistani art.

4.8. Khalid's Contribution to Feminist Art and Metamodern Theory.

The metamodern understanding of Khalid's practice proposed in this paper has implications beyond the analysis of her work to contribute usefully to two debates: the discourse on feminist spatial art and the discourse on metamodernism outside the Western context.

In the context of feminist spatial art, Khalid's use of domestic spaces for her installations builds upon what Parker and Pollock (1981: 122) described as feminist reclamations of the feminine crafts in the 1970s, arguing that the denigration of embroidery, weaving and other domestic arts as 'mere craft' rather than 'fine art' was a form of gender politics, a means in which the hard work, creativity and imagination of women were denigrated and excluded from the prestige economy of high art. requires a correspondingly enormous environment, In this reading, the feminist strategy was to take these crafts seriously as art and to show them in spaces of high art. Khalid extends this appropriation; she does not merely claim the crafts as an artistic medium, but uses them to craft advanced arguments about space, labor, and cultural value as gendered categories. Farah's installations are not craft elevated to art; they are art that uses craft as a critical vocabulary to make arguments that the craft tradition itself did not articulate, but which are articulated through henna ornamentation and textile construction.

In relation to the base discourse of metamodernism in non-Western contexts, Khalid's practice exemplifies the independently developed metamodern sensibility identified by this paper. Khalid's practice indicates, and the paper by Hashim and Puadi (2018) illustrates, that the metamodernism of non-Western art must be understood as an independently developed cultural formation, as opposed to being derivative of Euro-American metamodern theory. Khalid's art-making, and especially her use of South Asian feminine cultural heritage as a site of appropriation and adaptation, her teetering on the line between celebration and critique, and her calls upon beauty as an affective vehicle for political argumentation are all grounded in the particular historical, cultural and political milieu of Pakistani contemporary art, rather than in Euro-American metamodern theories, which almost all other scholars engage with.

The metamodern formal possibilities that this essay discovers in Khalid's work - constructive pastiche, oscillation, double frame narrative, normcore, meta-cute, reflexivity and maximalism - emerge not in the Euro-American cultural objects that Vermeulen and van den Akker originally applied the terms to but in the culturally specific forms that are constitutive to Khalid's South Asian feminine heritage. This degree of cultural specificity does not prevent the metamodern sensibility being useful as a framework around which to think about Khalid's work, however; it instead shows that the metamodern sensibility is a truly global cultural formation that manifests itself in culturally specific ways in any historical-cultural context (Jami, Awan and Rasul 2025).

5. Conclusion

Khalid's spatial installations are a contribution to feminist spatial art, to the metamodernism of the Global South, and to the critical history of contemporary art in Pakistan. Her work in constructive pastiche, through which she re, assembles South Asian feminine traditions of decorative henna, textile labor, and Islamic sacred geometry into new spatial arrangements that are at once jubilant and critical, is an exemplary manifestation of the metamodern oscillatory sensibility, especially in its spatial and ethical rendition. The installations hold beauty and constraint, celebration and critique, the spiritual and the material, the domestic and the cosmic in permanent productive tension, never allowing themselves to be simply naive celebration or merely cynical demystification.

The depth and precision of this extended metamodern reading of the normcore steel pin, metacut surface and ornamental imagery, double frame of beauty and threat, Sufi ironesty of the threshold, maximalism of devotional labor, reflexive self-awareness of a work's ethnocritical optic position in the cultural economy that it is committed to critiquing, suggests the strength of the metamodern approach to non-Western contemporary art. Reading Khalid's *I Am (and I Am Not)* comparatively alongside the rest of her oeuvre, provides further indicators that these metamodern-formal features are not medium specific or technically limited but express likewise deep structural commitments across Khalid's work.

In conclusion, Khalid's work would suggest Pakistani contemporary art is neither a product of the global art world nor derivative from it, but distinct in its aesthetics, with its own historical, cultural, and political specificity (Syed, 2015; Hashim & Puadi, 2018). The metamodern approach suggested above could be extended to Khalid's more recent video, performance, and photography works, to consider the metamodern dimensions of her practice across different formats, and the development of Khalid's metamodern aesthetic throughout her career.

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