Press Release

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Rethinking Textiles: Ten Young Designers from Germany and France Join the "Unternehmen – START" Programme 2026–2027

The Franco-German mentoring programme of the Goethe-Instituts in France and the Institut français Deutschland dedicates its third edition to textile innovation.

How can textiles be reinvented creatively, innovatively and with real entrepreneurial future? Ten young designers, material researchers and creative entrepreneurs from Germany and France are now taking on this question. They form the new cohort of "Unternehmen – START", the Franco-German support programme for young talents in the cultural and creative industries. Over several months, they will be accompanied, advised and connected with one goal in mind: to turn ideas into viable businesses that make an impact across borders.

"Unternehmen – START" is one of the most important Franco-German exchange platforms in the cultural and creative industries. Together, the Goethe-Instituts in France and the Institut français Deutschland have brought their previous initiatives together and developed them into a long-term programme. For both cultural institutes, supporting young creatives is more than career development: they see it as part of their shared mission to connect the civil societies of both countries and to strengthen Franco-German cooperation where the next generation works, founds and designs. Individual career paths thus give rise to networks, partnerships and joint projects that extend far beyond the duration of the programme and strengthen the European creative economy as a whole.

Following an open first cohort and an edition devoted to immersive cultures, the 2026–2027 programme places textiles centre stage. The focus is on the innovative potential of textile materials and the craft techniques associated with them, from wool processing and Jacquard weaving to bacterial dyeing processes and bio-based leather alternatives. The programme brings together incubators, artisans, manufacturers and designers, showcasing the traditions of both countries as well as their innovative strength. It seeks applications in which materials and processes are rethought in order to address social, cultural and ecological challenges.

At the heart of the programme are two week-long study trips to France and Germany. On site, participants discover local initiatives and innovative approaches and engage with key players in the textile sector and the creative industries. This is complemented by individual support tailored to each project: workshops, expert talks and mentoring provide technical knowledge, sharpen each participant's design signature and strengthen entrepreneurial skills, from material research to business management and financing.

The Ten Designers

Alice Etheimer
Alice Etheimer recently graduated in textile design from La Cambre art school in Brussels. She has developed a new, sustainable wool-based weaving technique. With a laboratory of her own, she aims to develop the process further and make it usable for industrial applications, above all in interior design and furnishings.

Vorlette Fakhri
Vorlette Fakhri is an entrepreneur who is building a consultancy dedicated to the ecological transformation of the textile industry and to innovation through craft know-how. She trained at the École nationale supérieure des Arts Décoratifs (EnsAD) and gained experience at Atelier LUMA, among others. She is particularly committed to preserving endangered craft techniques, opening up new economic perspectives for them and a place in contemporary design.

Marion Gouez
Marion Gouez is a textile designer who explores pattern and its many forms of expression. Her portfolio reflects an ongoing creative quest and an openness to different forms of collaboration. Her work shows great curiosity in the design process and an ability to reinterpret the textile medium again and again.

Gaspard Fleury-Dugy
Gaspard Fleury-Dugy is a designer and graduate of the École Duperré in Paris. He develops exceptional textile objects at the intersection of digital craft, textile and product design. His work is distinguished by a strong design signature and an innovative approach to materials and manufacturing processes. It has already received wide recognition from cultural institutions, the art world and the media.

Julie Merlino
Julie Merlino is a textile designer and material researcher. Her work centres on the relationship between light and matter. Her projects explore the interplay of perception, materiality and space and open up new perspectives on textile materials. With her experimental yet sensitive approach at the intersection of art and science, she makes a distinctive contribution to research into innovative materials.

Vera Bracklo
Vera Bracklo is a textile designer who explores contemporary applications of traditional textile techniques. Her career has a strong international dimension, shaped in particular by her close ties to Japan, which also inform her design universe.

Nena Ellermann
Nena Ellermann is a researcher developing a new, environmentally friendly bacteria-based dyeing process. Her portfolio stands out for its particular aesthetic quality and a sensitive handling of material and colour. With her expertise in material research,

she brings a scientific perspective to the exchange and to potential collaborations with the other participants.

Paolina-Luna Kühr
Paolina-Luna Kühr is a Franco-German material designer and founder of Orsa Studio. Her research focuses on textile innovation, in particular kombucha-based leather alternatives, as well as bio-based glass. Her European background and her projects reflect great creative sensitivity, a keen aesthetic sense and a strong drive to innovate. Her work combines material research, high aesthetic standards and sustainable approaches in a particularly forward-looking way.

Viviana Losacco
Viviana Losacco is a textile designer who creates objects using tufting techniques. She aims to expand her interior furnishings practice internationally. Her approach is consistently sustainable: among other things, she transforms wool remnants and surplus materials into one-of-a-kind pieces, giving new value to existing textile resources.

Johanna Rogalla
Johanna Rogalla is a textile designer and visual artist. Her work combines design, artistic research and technological innovation, with a particular interest in complex weave structures and industrial Jacquard weaving. She is currently developing experimental fabrics on industrial looms. Alongside her artistic practice, she is active in the collective *atelier savvy – reframing textiles* and in building sustainable networks between craft, industry, research and design.

About “Unternehmen – START”

“Unternehmen – START” is a Franco-German mentoring programme of the Goethe-Instituts in France and the Institut français Deutschland, with the support of the Franco-German Youth Office (FGYO), for young creative entrepreneurs and designers under the age of 36. The programme runs over several months and includes study trips, coaching, workshops and professional meetings.

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