



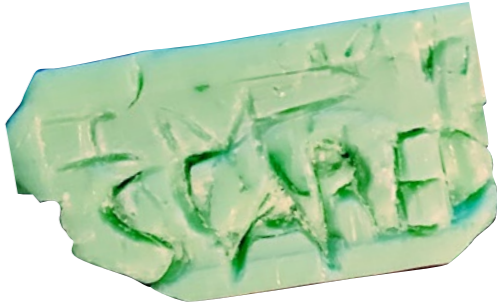
**#OverMyDeadBody**

ANDREA WALTERS



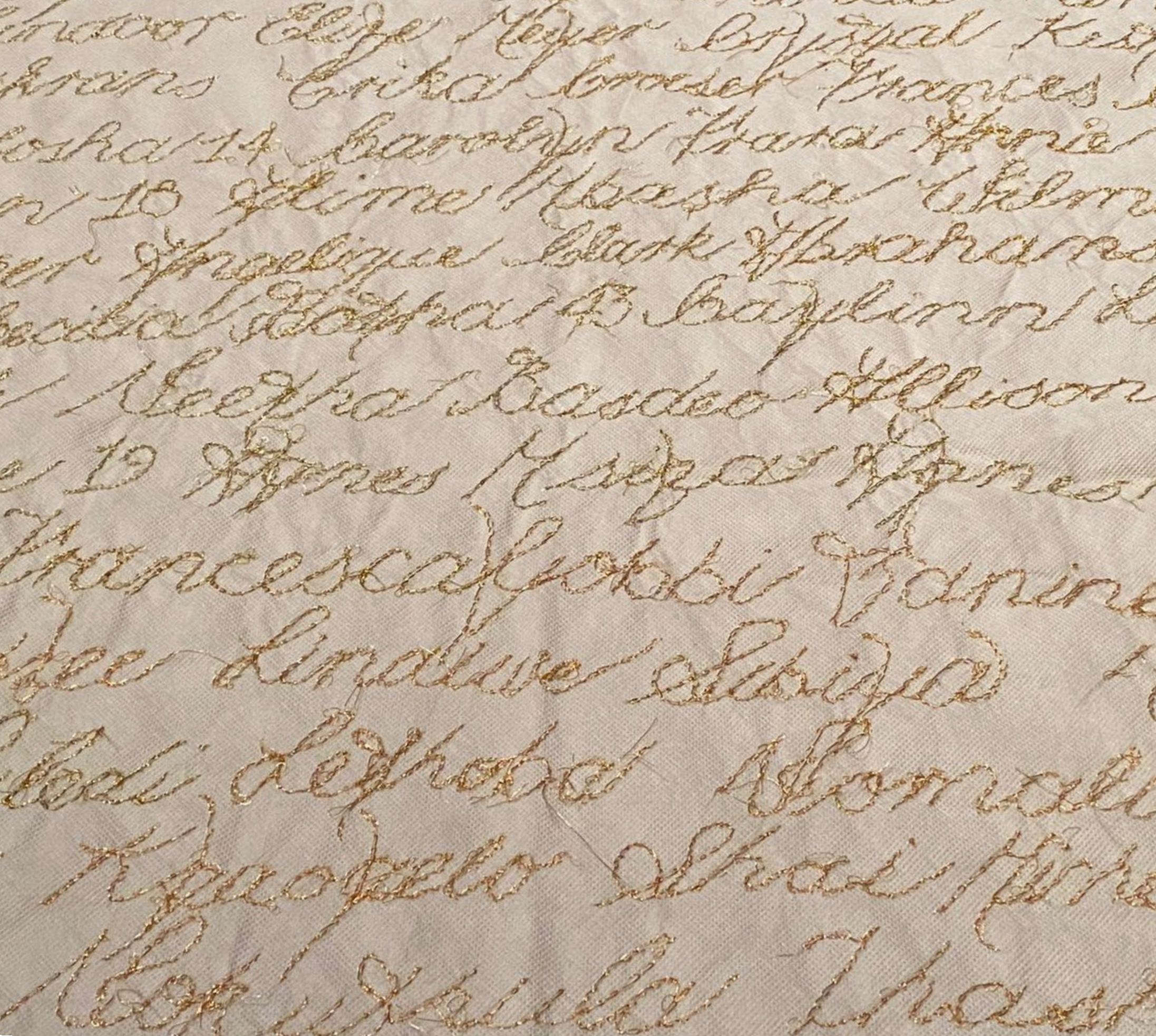
#OverMyDead

by ANDREA W



# #OverMyDeadBody

ANDREA WALTERS 2022



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Fig 2. Previous spread left: Public participation: soap carving (2022).  
Fig 3. Previous spread right: Unknown, I'm scared (2022).  
Fig 4. Opposite: Andrea Walters, #OverMyDeadBody IV detail (2022).



Fig 5. Opposite: Andrea Walters, #OverMyDeadBody IV installation view (2022).

Fig 6. Above: Andrea Walters, #OverMyDeadBody IV installation view (2022).



## Introduction

Although my relationship seemed conventional, I was subjected to IPV over several years and was eventually hospitalised with PTSD. After the relationship, I studied visual arts through Unisa. My lecturers identified that my work concerned domestic violence and gently encouraged me to follow my instincts. This resulted in an exhibition entitled *Vrou Vertaal* (2012), revealing how a woman is devastated by abuse.

After Anene Booysen died, gang raped and disembowelled by her ex-boyfriend and his friends, Reeva Steenkamp was shot by her partner. This precipitated my exhibition, *Object of Desire* (2013) exploring the public adulation of professional athletes, the actions of their corporate sponsors and how they are perceived by the media.



Fig 7 Soaps carved in the gallery by viewers (2022).

Fig 8. Top right: Andrea Walters, *Charnelle (Lalla) Hough* (2022).

Fig 9. Bottom right: Andrea Walters, *Natasha Booise* (2022).



Research revealed that South Africa has one of the highest rates of femicide in the world, where there is a commonly held perception that women can be punished by violence or death. My anger and grief were compounded when I discovered that at least four women die daily at the hands of their partners. These statistics inspired this exhibition *#OverMyDeadBody*.

This catalogue discusses the four components of *#OverMyDeadBody* (2022), the Durban Art Gallery, City Hall. I rely on material thinking, traumatic memory, tacit knowledge and practice-led research, since these direct my thoughts and my artmaking.

The inclination to feel materials, to think through their handling is what links creativity with life. Barrett (2007:2) posits that when experience, practice and knowledge converge, these can be vital to generating new discoveries. Orozco (2017:353) argues for the significance of banal, everyday objects that can perform an impactful role in protest action. González (1995:133) notes that, over time, objects become integrated with the psychic body as prosthesis of the mind or as autotopographies. Bal (2002) concurs that autotopographies are created from personal items. Curiously, I mostly respond to ordinary household objects and in this case, I decided to use green Sunlight soap bars because this soap transcends any socio-economic or racial group - most women use it.

Fig 10. Andrea Walters, *#OverMyDeadBody I* installation view (2022).

Fig 11. Top right. Andrea Walters, *Gomolemo Legae* (2022).

Fig 12. Centre right. Andrea Walters, *Tshegofatso Pule* (2022).

Fig 13. Bottom right. Andrea Walters, *Precious Ramabulana* (2022).



# Trauma, Memory and Art-Making

Van Alphen's proposes that art itself must contest its boundaries and the veracities of trauma (Bennett 2005:3, 4). If art is delimited by generic categorisation, it constrains original ways of conceptualising how art exposes and signifies trauma (Bennett 2005:4). Importantly, if an artwork cannot convey the crux of a subject's memory, it may for viewers, summon other traumatic memories. Bennett's focus concerns the conjunction of cognition, affect and its autonomic responses (Bennett 2005:11). Due to personal experience, traumatic memory pervades *#OverMyDeadBody*. I am determined that these women will be named and mourned. The *#OverMyDeadBody* exhibition comprises four parts, each of which is aligned with a specific theme: absent presence, naming, traumatic memory and grievability.

Fig 14. Top right. Andrea Walters, *Nikita Maloni* (2022).

Fig 15. Bottom right. Andrea Walters, *Altecia Kortje* (2022).



# *#OverMyDeadBody I*

I went online to find an image of Tshogofatso Pule, a heavily pregnant woman shot and hanged at the behest of her lover. Using children's carving tools and a toothbrush, I sculpted her mouth. It was an uncomfortable process because I thought about what had happened to her and how terrified she must have been. I thought about her mouth and how she must have begged for her life and that of her unborn child. For me, the mouth became the most poignant, personal form of identification.

I conducted research on femicides in the daily newspapers and online. As a member of various women's organisations opposing VAW, the names and narratives came faster than I imagined. After a period of research, I would have to stop and carve mouths

Fig 16. Top right. Andrea Walters, *Susan Rohde* (2022).

Fig 17. Bottom right. Andrea Walters, *Reeva Steenkamp* (2022).





because I became so depressed and horrified at what was happening to women. I would carve the mouths gently, even speaking to the woman I was trying to represent. When I became ill from the potent smell of the soaps, I would work on other pieces until I could return to the research.

I had intended to carve as many women as were killed daily but I soon became aware that this was futile. It takes a day to carve a mouth, while at least four women are killed every day. After a woman was discovered buried under the bath by her husband two years after she disappeared, I thought about the poor rural women who do not have recourse to the law or social services. Forty-eight named women, ranging in age from 16 to 64 years, are accompanied by The Unknown Woman, who represents those femicide victims who are never found. The final soap is of the generic digital head and shoulders, representing the woman being killed right now.



Fig 18. Top right. Andrea Walters, *Nobantu Vicky Ntozini* (2022).  
Fig 19. Bottom right. Andrea Walters, *Vicky Terblanche* (2022).

I believe that the ongoing femicides in South Africa are, individually and culturally, our contemporary historical reality. Perhaps, through aesthetic practices, the means for acknowledgment and transformation are possible. Pollock observes that, instead of our outdated interchanges between amnesia and remembering, we should consider the more challenging concept of art as *compassion* (Pollock 2010:847).

*#OverMyDeadBody I* consists of 50 Sunlight soap bars carved to represent the mouths of victims of femicide. It links their absence to the present.

I commenced by doing five-minute sketches of my mouth every day. These expressed different moods and angles, enabling me to familiarise myself with the bone and tooth structure supporting the mouth. I sourced photographs of the murdered women from news and social media. Each bar of soap is a faithful representation of a specific victim's mouth. Her name and age at death is carved into the reverse side. The last soap is a generic social media 'head-and-shoulders'



Fig 20. Top right. Andrea Walters, *Janet Scott* (2022).  
Fig 21. Bottom right. Andrea Walters, *Jill Packham* (2022).



Fig 2. Top: Andrea Walters, *Anene Booysen* (2022).  
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Fig 35. Bottom: Andrea Walters, *The Unknown Woman* (2022).  
Fig 36. Opposite: Andrea Walters, *#OverMyDeadBody I* installation view (2022).

emoji representing a woman being killed while the work is viewed. These soap sculptures were placed on transparent Perspex shelves and suspended from the ceiling. LED track-lighting illuminated the details on the reverse sides, creating the impression that the soaps were fragile, floating in mid-air.

The figurative representations of the mouths disrupt the generalisations of femicide. The mouths in *#OverMyDeadBody I* serve as counter-monuments, critiquing a system that enables women to be killed by partners. These sculptures create a present-past that functions as a trace of each dead woman. By Bal's definition, this fortifies the link between theory and art and, as a reflection of our violent present, it acts as an historical, political work (2010:17). I have made individual memorials ignited by the notion of female domestic labour and Sunlight soap. Just as soap disintegrates with use, the memories of these women are diminished over time.





## #OverMyDeadBody II

*#OverMyDeadBody II* is a video projection that was suspended above a worn rug in the gallery. In a looped performance, I recite the victims' names, their ages and how they were murdered. The video had to be re-filmed several times because I became emotional. Nevertheless, the experiences of the victims are not mine and I am careful not to exploit them. *#OverMyDeadBody II* addresses the juncture between art and trauma, a realist aesthetics that encourages relational communication (Bennett 2005:7). Viewers respond to the suffering of characters to whom they relate. I divulge only the name, age and method of death factually, avoiding a sentimental response. As determined by Bennett, the affective responses of viewers/listeners emerge from "the direct engagement with sensation" as it manifests in the work. The work is thus transactive rather than communicative (Bennett 2005:7). This video exceeds the link between maker and the artwork because it plays back at a society that makes femicide possible. My artist's statement read, "I hope that 'something' happens between you and

these artworks to evoke an emotional response. Please participate by carving the extra soaps provided." To encourage participatory viewing, I put piles of soap and carving tools on the rug. Every few days, I had to bring more soaps. The soaps have been collected as evidence of the relationship between viewers and *#OverMyDeadBody II*.

Andrea Walters, *#OverMyDeadBody II* installation video (2022).  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jUsxLHR7iCs>

Fig 37. Opposite: Andrea Walters, *#OverMyDeadBody I* installation view with public participation (2022).

# #OverMyDeadBody

by ANDREA WALTERS

## #OverMyDeadBody III

The rusted skeleton of a double-bed hovers, suspended from the ceiling, above a worn cotton sheet. For two months before the exhibition, the mattress topped the sheet in our garden. In a daily ritual, I sprayed salt water on the mattress and grated Sunlight soap into the springs. When it was installed in the gallery, I instinctively gathered the soap residue on the sheet and moved it to the right side, creating the form of a woman on what was 'my' side of the marital bed. This offers a phenomenological encounter by means of its construction and conceptual function (Linde 2017:2). The suspended bed cannot be slept in. It serves as a monument to remembered trauma associated with a place that functions as both absence and presence (Linde 2017:2). In my view, the title is both metonym and metaphor.

An artwork can elicit various emotions, including suffering, compassion, mercy, comfort, apprehension and frailty. This work engendered a great deal of comment from viewers. For me, the suspended mattress refers to a place where rest and intimacy have long been

banished/vanished. The mattress is high enough to imagine it crashing down on the worn sheet, showering rust and soap. The ephemeral image of the woman testifies to her frailty and her absence.

In this situation, the abused woman instinctively recognises the possibility of Das's "bad death", the "unwitnessed" death, (Seremakis in Bennett 2005:51). A necessary exploration involves the relationship between the artist, who encounters the trauma of others, and the viewer as spectator, who responds to visual imagery through an affective response. For me, *#OverMyDeadBody III* portrays the internalised anxiety associated with violent abuse, facilitating a state of grief as an embodied perception (2005:53, 54).

Fig 38. Andrea Walters, *#OverMyDeadBody III* installation view (2022).

Fig 39. Overleaf left: Andrea Walters, *#OverMyDeadBody III* installation view (2022).

Fig 40. Overleaf right: Andrea Walters, *#OverMyDeadBody III* installation view (2022).





## #OverMyDeadBody IV

*#OverMyDeadBody IV* is a mortuary gurney covered by an embroidered shroud and a lament played on a concealed speaker. The shroud was obtained from a funeral home after my mother passed away. The cream fabric is perforated by tiny holes and feels like blotting paper since it is designed to absorb body fluids. The embroidery was done in gold thread, alluding to compassion. Singer Mariechan Luiters, a GBV survivor, went into the recording studio, sat down at a piano and improvised a lament in the dark. It is called *Thula* (2022).

According to Bennett (2005:45), artworks activate links and connections so that the question is not 'what does it mean?' or 'what trauma is depicted?' One should ask instead, 'how does it work?' When interior experience relates to the exterior viewer, then a basis for empathy is generated.

The pain of bereavement is usually considered as something that must be worked through over time. In an essay on violent death, Das disagrees, affirming the agency of pain: "In the register of the imaginary, the

pain of the other not only asks for a home in language but also seeks a home in the body"

Trauma is not a nebulous event affecting a single person, it has a tangible effect on the world (Bennett 2005:49). I believe that *#OverMyDeadBody IV* conforms to what Bennett refers to as a relationship with the primary subjects of violence, facilitating the enactment of a type of embodied perception enhanced by my handwriting. I know I could have been one of them. Instead of being perceived as a narrative of memory, the inscriptions on the shroud can be seen as the symbolic repetition - or sense-memory enactment - of trauma. It is not just the shroud that covers the dead but its transformation, its "making strange" that affects the viewer. This transformation attests not only to these individual deaths but to the repetitive cycle of ongoing violence against women (Barrett 2005:67).

Fig 41. Andrea Walters, *#OverMyDeadBody III detail* (2022).



Fig 42. Above: Andrea Walters, #OverMyDeadBody IV (2022).

Fig 43. Opposite: Andrea Walters, #OverMyDeadBody IV (2022).

Andrea Walters, #OverMyDeadBody IV Thula lament soundtrack (2022).  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eRrAF-XzqD4>







## Conclusion

I contend that the artworks comprising *#OverMyDeadBody* (2022) are political, since they speak back to the culture that inspired them and which continues to be affected by femicide. Bal explains this as the dynamic between the temporality, the art objects and the social reaction that inspires a captivating, communal thought process: a triple theoretical activity (Bal 2010:7). The dynamic between these art objects, their audience, the duration and social response encourages powerful, collective reflection. The opposition between the artist and the art object is circumvented because the work exceeds the artist's 'ownership', functioning instead as a reflection of the social order from which it originates. These works provoke and mourn, and, in a political sense, enable the viewer to comprehend and think about the abuse of women in South Africa.

Fig 44. Andrea Walters, *#OverMyDeadBody IV* detail (2022).

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Fig 45. Andrea Walters, #OverMyDeadBody process work (2022).

# Artist's Statement

The *#OverMyDeadBody* exhibition interrogates the ongoing perception that it is acceptable for a man to punish a woman through violence or death so, as an act of protest, I draw attention to the women who have died at their partners' hands. The processes and media used to honour South African femicide victims are influenced by my experiences of Intimate Partner Violence. I find that memories and creative solutions are activated by handling domestic objects in areas traditionally viewed as women's spaces. When a woman, as sufferer or survivor, sees art relating to violence against women, it provokes an instinctive response: she remembers because she cannot forget. Several affected women have approached me to share their experiences. Residual traumatic memory engenders empathy and grief for the victims, so I name them, bringing them into the here-and-now of the present although they are absent.

Initially, I gathered data and images of femicide victims through various media, mostly online, searching for a medium that represents most South African

women, irrespective of socio-economic, racial or cultural affiliations since the femicides transcend these boundaries. I decided that since green Sunlight bars are found in most households, I would carve the victims' mouths into the soap. Fifty sculptured mouths are suspended at eye level on Perspex shelves. My mother's passing inspired a suspended, illuminated death shroud embroidered with the victims' names in gold. A lone singer's voice mourns the dead, while in an audio-visual performance, I recite the names and ages of the femicide victims and their manner of death. A rusted double bed hovers above the ground over a stained sheet. The shadow of a woman's body, created from rust and soap detritus, counters the notion of a bedroom as the locus of intimacy and rest. I supply soaps and carving tools to encourage viewers to participate in the exhibition. I hope that 'something' happens between the viewer and the works to evoke a response.



# Biography

Andrea Walters was born in Komani in the Eastern Cape. Her childhood was spent in Knysna, Windhoek, Bloemfontein and Durban. After school, she relocated to Cape Town, Pretoria and Johannesburg. She has worked as a model, freelance copywriter, events co-ordinator, art director and ran her own design studio for five years. She currently lives and works in Durban.

Andrea Walters, *#OverMyDeadBody* (2022).  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vci63doOi0l&t=5s>

# Exhibitions

November 2012	Vrou Vertaal, Unisa Art Gallery (Merit Award) Curated by Gwenneth Miller and Colleen Alborough.
February 2013	Selected Third Level Exhibition at the Unisa Art Gallery Curated by Gwenneth Miller and Colleen Alborough.
July 2014	Sculptural Fibre Art Exhibition, IQC Africa Emperors Palace, East Rand. Curated by Dana Biddle and Celia de Villiers.
February 2015	Abject of Desire, artSPACE Durban Curated by Gwenneth Miller and Colleen Alborough.
April 2015	Blowing in the Wind, KZN Art Gallery, Durban Curated by Carol Brown.
July 2015	Blowing in the Wind, UFS Art Gallery, Bloemfontein Curated by Carol Brown.
November 2019	Unisa Staff Exhibition, Unisa Art Gallery, Pretoria Curated by Paul Cooper.
June 2021	Making and Interpreting Art, University of Johannesburg Online exhibition.
August 2021	Folds and Faults, Johannes Stegmann Art Gallery, Bloemfontein Curated by Angela de Jesus.
March 2022	#OverMyDeadBody, Durban Art Gallery, Durban Curated by Gwenneth Miller and Jennifer Stretton.
August 2022	Sasol New Signatures, Pretoria Art Museum Curated by Nandi Hilliard.

# Media

Melody Emmett. **#Over my dead body: giving voice to the victims of femicide.**

<https://www.iol.co.za/entertainment/whats-on/durban/andrea-walters-over-my-dead-body-multimedia-exhibition-spotlights-femicide-082404b9-e046-492d-9f92-53a5b740528f> <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2022-02-28-over-my-dead-body-giving-voice-to-the-victims-of-femicide/>

Jo Cossavella. **Meet Andrea Walters** - multimedia artist extraordinaire. <https://www.unisa.ac.za/sites/corporate/default/News-&Media/Articles/Meet-Andrea-Walters-multimedia-artist-extraordinaire>

**Exhibition honours victims of femicide at the Durban Art Gallery**

<https://bereamail.co.za/281494/exhibition-honours-victims-of-femicide-at-durban-art-gallery/>

**Exhibition shines Sunlight on women silenced forever by their partners**

<https://www.timeslive.co.za/sunday-times-daily/news/2022-03-01-exhibition-shines-sunlight-on-women-silenced-forever-by-their-partners/>

**#Over my dead body: a multimedia exhibition honouring women slain by their partners**

<https://www.themercury.co.za/dailynews/news/kwazulu-natal/overmydeadbody-a-multimedia-exhibition-honouring-women-slain-by-their-partners-06186ae3-711d-47eb-95cc-f5742fec4831>

**Nokuthula Mabuza. Exhibition honours women slain by their partners**

<https://www.pressreader.com/south-africa/daily-news-south-africa/20220307/281668258437988>

**They remember because they cannot forget**

<https://thestar.co.za/ios/news/they-remember-because-they-cannot-forget-690dc076-7ea7-4030-ac03-90a523ed0863>

**Jess Bothma. Today I attended the opening of Andrea Walters exhibition #OverMy DeadBody.**

<https://www.facebook.com/885989974815552/posts/today-attended-the-opening-of-andrea-walters-exhibition-overmydeadbody-its-a-ver/4902792673135242/>  
<http://news.artsmart.co.za/2022/03/>

**Artist carves tribute to abused women**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YOBML04IkwE>

**The Aubrey Masango Show. Radio 702. South Africans doing great things with multimedia artist, activist, contemplative and survivor of domestic violence Andrea Walters talking about her exhibition work '#Over My Dead Body'.**

<https://omny.fm/shows/evening-show/south-africans-doing-great-things-with-multi-media>



Beautiful News:To heal from trauma, this artist is carving a tribute to South African women.  
<https://www.beautifulnews.com/heal-violence-artist-carving-tribute-south-african-women>

Fig 42. Andrea Walters, *#OverMyDeadBody* participatory carving (2022).



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