

SOUTH AFRICAN INTIMATE PARTNER FEMICIDE: ART AS ABSENT PRESENCE

by

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DECLARATION

I declare that *South African intimate partner femicide: art as absent presence* (2023) is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or cited have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

I declare that I have submitted the dissertation to originality checking software and that it falls within the accepted requirements for originality.

I further declare that I have not previously submitted this work, or any part thereof, for examination at the University of South Africa for another qualification or to any other institution of higher learning.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Andrea L. Sapers." The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'A' and a long, sweeping underline.

March 2023

TITLE:

South African intimate partner femicide: art as absent presence

SUMMARY:

This study examines how as artists, Gabrielle Goliath and I articulate the absent presence of women killed through intimate partner violence. Since we are both influenced by residual traumatic memory, tacit knowledge is central to our strategies regarding the absent presence of victims. Goliath and I name the victims, extending notions of grievability and mourning. The study considers to what extent our artworks conform with Hubert Damisch's conception of theoretical art objects, requiring interdisciplinary theory, contemplation and social affect that transcends the personal. This qualitative, practice-led research has an interdisciplinary foundation primarily based on cultural theory, art and trauma studies.

LIST OF KEY TERMS:

Affect; empathy; Gabrielle Goliath; grievability; intimate partner violence; mourning, naming; tacit knowledge; theoretical art objects; traumatic memory.

TITEL:

Suid-Afrikaanse intieme-maat vrouemoord: kuns as afwesige teenwoordigheid

OPSOMMING:

In hierdie studie ondersoek ek en Gabrielle Goliath hoe ons as kunstenaars uiting gee aan die afwesige teenwoordigheid van vroue wat gewelddadig om die lewe gebring is deur hulle intieme lewensmaats. Aangesien residuele traumatiese herinneringe ons al twee beïnvloed, is stilswyende wete die kern van ons strategieë om met die afwesige teenwoordigheid van hierdie slagoffers om te gaan. Ek en Goliath benoem die slagoffers om die denkbeelde betreurbaarheid en rou uit te beeld. Hierdie studie ondersoek die mate waarin ons kunswerke aansluit by Hubert Damisch se begrip teoretiese kunsvoorwerpe. Dit verg interdisciplinêre teorie, oorpeinsing en sosiale affek wat die persoonlike transendeer. Hierdie kwalitatiewe en praktykgerigte navorsing berus op hoofsaaklik kultuurteorie, kuns en traumastudie as 'n interdisciplinêre grondslag.

Lys sleutelbegrippe:

Affek; benoeming; betreurbaarheid; empatie; Gabrielle Goliath; geweld deur 'n intieme lewensmaat; rou; stilswyende wete; teoretiese kunsvoorwerpe; traumatiese herinnering.

ISIHLOKO:

Ukubulawa kwabesifazane yizithandani zabo eNingizimu Afrika: Ubuciko njengokungabi khona

UKUFINGQA:

Lolu cwaningo luhlola ukuthi njengoba abaculi, uGabrielle Goliath kanye nami sikuchaza kanjani ukungabi khona kwabesifazane ababulawa ngodlame yizithandwa zabo. Njengoba sobabili sithonywa inkumbulo yokuhlukumezeka eyinsalela, ulwazi oluzuzile ngokuzibonela luwumgogodla wamasu ethu mayelana nokungabi khona kwezisulu. Mina noGoliath siqamba izisulu, sidlulisela imibono yokudabuka nokulila. Ucwaningo lubheka ukuthi imisebenzi yethu yobuciko ihambisana kangakanani nombono ka-Hubert Damisch wezinto zobuciko bomcabango wombono, ezidinga umbono wemikhakha ehlukenene, ukucabanga kanye nomthelela wezenhlalo owedlula okomuntu siqu. Loluhlobo olungoluchazayo, oluholwa wukuzibonela lunesisekelo semikhakha eyahlukene ngokuyinhloko esekelwe embonweni wamasiko, ezobuciko kanye nezifundo zokuhlukumezeka.

UHLU LWAMAGAMA ASEMQOKA:

eziyinkimbinkimbi Umbono obhekene nezinkinga zomphakathi;
Gabrielle Goliath; inkumbulo yokuhlukumezeka;
izinto zombono wobuciko; thinta; ukubalawa kwesithandwa ngodlame; ukudabuka uzwelo; ukulila; ukuqamba; ulwazi oluzuzile ngokuzibonela.

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

South African intimate partner femicide: art as absent presence addresses the seemingly contradictory notion of absent presence and sets the research problem within this violent sub-culture. After all, 'absence' and 'presence' are self-referential: one is either here or not, while both are reliant on being somewhere. The study considers how fellow South African artist Gabrielle Goliath and I convey the absent presence of victims of domestic violence and femicide.

It investigates and compares the four elements of my installation *#OverMyDeadBody* (2022) with selected works by Goliath from various exhibitions over the past 12 years. I focus on her photographic portraits, *Berenice 10-28* (2010), *Berenice 29-39* (2022), the *Personal Accounts* (2014) video portraits, and the multi-track *Elegy* (2018) performance dedicated to Eunice Ntombifuthi Dube.

I consider how residual traumatic memory, tacit knowledge, naming, grievability and mourning support the artists' articulations of absent presence. From a hypothetical perspective, the study investigates to what extent these works, defying women's erasure-and-forgetting, function as theoretical art objects.

1.1 GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN SOUTH AFRICA

This project is motivated by the overwhelming number of women who are killed by husbands, lovers, former lovers or would-be lovers (Abrahams, Mathews, Martin, Lombard and Jewkes 2013). According to Leburu-Masigo (2020:177), the impact of violence against women (VAW) has been debated since 1994. After 25 years of democracy and supposed gender equality, women continue to experience endemic levels of gender-based violence (GBV). It is regarded as a major problem in South Africa, one which can no longer be ignored (Leburu-Masigo 2020:177).

1.1.1 Gender-based violence in context

GBV is a common in South Africa; furthermore, incidences of such violence increase annually. GBV includes sexual, physical, mental and economic harm inflicted in public or in private. It includes threats of violence, coercion and manipulation, taking the forms of intimate partner violence (IPV), sexual violence, child marriage, female genital mutilation and so-called 'honour crimes' (United Nations Refugee Agency 2019).

South Africa has one of the most advanced constitutions in the world. Although women have equal status under the law, the country has a femicide rate five times the global average (Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Section 9 of 1996). The preamble of the Women's Charter states:

We, the women of South Africa, wives and mothers, working women and housewives, African, Indian, European and Coloured, hereby declare our aim of striving for the removal of all laws, regulations, conventions and customs that discriminate against us as women, and that deprive us in any way of our inherent rights to the advantages, responsibilities and opportunities that society offers to any one section of the population (Preamble: Women's Charter of 1954, 17 April).

Despite this assertion, 69 years later the lived experience of a vast multitude of women has not changed at all. In 2010, Mathews (2010:v) found that 50.3% of women murdered in South Africa were killed by an intimate partner. This figure rose to 57% in 2017 (Maleka 2019:5) and in 2018 the statistic translated to a woman killed every three hours (Wilkinson 2019).

Leburu-Masigo (2020:176-7) states that millions of South African women face the triple challenge of unemployment, poverty and racial inequality. The lack of social and economic opportunities presents a risk factor for IPV, especially for poor women (Edwards in Davis 2011:61). Violence as a solution to conflict is entrenched in the unequal power relations of South African identities (Vetten in Davis 2011:61).

1.1.2 Intimate partner violence in context

The media presents a skewed, patriarchal narrative of GBV and femicide. Isaacs (2014:ii) finds that media reports in *The Cape Argus*, *The Cape Times* and *Daily Voice* reveal bias: the victims are blamed for provocation, or the judiciary is deemed unfair. The media supports patriarchal power, positioning women as victims rather than focusing on the structural causes of the violence (Spies 2020:42). The ideal victim is moral, passive and 'good' because the 'bad' woman deserves what happens to her. The media's ideal victim is white, heterosexual, attractive and middle class: she receives more press coverage than the 'bad' woman whose status is bound to race and class (Spies 2020:42).¹ If the woman is young, beautiful and famous, she receives even more press attention (usually salacious) as evidenced by

¹ Based on news reports and social media sites on Facebook and Instagram, my research indicates an increase in coverage of young, beautiful black women who die by femicide (<https://sawomenfightback.com>; @womenforchangesa).

the media's dissection of Reeva Steenkamp's prior relationships (Monkton-Smith 2012:63). Journalists' language influences perceptions of violence against women and the event (Bullock and Cubert 2002:478-9, 493).

1.1.3 Intersectionality and risk factors

Leburu-Masigo (2020:177) opines that pervasive violence against women transcends racial and economic markers. Scant femicide data is available from population-based surveys since the South African Police Service (SAPS) does not accumulate separate data concerning intimate partner femicides (Leburu-Masigo 2020:178-9).² The SAPS records femicides under the definition of 'homicide' hence inaccurate data obscures the real tally of women murdered by their partners (Mathews 2010:28, 33, 47, 86).

Customary law affects most rural African people and many urban inhabitants. It prioritises inheritance, marriage status and land ownership (Mbatha in Bennett 2007:54). Accordingly, women are regarded as inferior or minors, depriving them of rights concerning their children and property (The Constitutional Court of South Africa: Section 9).

Traversing race, class and culture, South African society is predominantly patriarchal whereby the husband/father is accepted as the head of the household. For example, participants in Professor Mazibuko's study in Mamelodi township stated that they became "paid goods" after their husbands had disbursed *ilobolo*³ (Mazibuko 2016:7378). "Most women come to accept the violence perpetrated against them as a cultural given" (Leburu and Phetlho-Thekisho 2015:410). From a very young age, South African children are taught to perform traditional gender roles, accepting a social scenario that discriminates against women and girls, entrenching and normalising unequal access to resources and opportunities (Leburu-Masigo 2020:178).

2 In 2020, the SAPS began releasing crime statistics every quarter. In a presentation accompanying the release of statistics for April to June 2020, the police were more specific about the relationships between the victims and their killers in domestic violence-related murders. During that time period, 55% of domestic violence-related murders were perpetrated by husbands or boyfriends (<https://mg.co.za/health/2021-04-14-sayhername-the-faces-of-south-africas-femicide-epidemic/>, https://www.saps.gov.za/services/April_June%202020_2021).

3 *Ilobolo* is a custom among many southern African peoples of giving cattle, goods, or money to the parents of a woman or girl in order to secure her hand in marriage (<https://dsae.co.za/entry/lobola/e04333>).

1.2 BACKGROUND

Gabrielle Goliath lives in Johannesburg, Gauteng whereas I live in Durban, KwaZulu- Natal. Both cities have high levels of violence against women. We are both profoundly influenced by prior trauma, which I believe is the catalyst that drives our work. In Goliath's case, her childhood friend, Berenice (aged nine) was shot dead at home in a 'domestic incident' on Christmas Eve in 1991. Goliath's memorial to Berenice in 2010, reprised in 2022, evidences the impact of her death (Gabrielle Goliath 2022b). Goliath's work continues to focus on IPV, the rape and murder of women and LGBTIQ+ individuals in South Africa.

I endured IPV for seven years. My third-year exhibition reflected on my experiences of intimate abuse which I thought were uncommon. After Anene Booysen and Reeva Steenkamp were murdered in 2013, I researched femicide in South Africa. When I became aware of the extent to which women are abused and killed by men, it was a watershed moment. Although IPV and femicide are rampant in South Africa, few artists address the topic. There is scant writing from an artist's perspective, whereas I write as a survivor of IPV (Seid 2015) and as an artist. I am committed to addressing domestic violence and femicide in my country, hence the title of my art exhibition: *#OverMyDeadBody*.

Goliath and I have been impacted by our traumatic experiences of violence, creating an embodied sense-feeling that is manifested through the physicality of the art making process. Goliath is particularly concerned about how, as an artist, one can ethically articulate someone else's pain, although one cannot subjectively know or feel it (Goliath in Pather and Boulle 2019:129).

Barrett (2007:10) states that knowledge derived from creative praxis is always subjective, significantly positioned and experienced. Hustvedt (2016:133) explains that art making is something internal and instinctive, illuminating a focused sense of re-placed or materialised absence. It is this empathic 'knowing' which guides artists who tell truths that are not dependent on 'being' there.

Goliath and I name the victims of femicide, an act that responds to Butler's (2020) concept of "grievability".⁴ Butler contends that if some lives are defended over others, this exposes the inequality of the living: some lives are valued while others are not. When a valued life is lost through violence it is grievable, whereas if unvalued people die, they are ungrievable. This counters the presumption that

4 Butler speaks of 'grievability' in the context of the US war against militant Islamists in her book, *The force of non-violence: an ethico-political bind* (2020). This concept is as pertinent to the context of femicides.

every life lost to femicide is grievable, irrespective of race, socio-economic status or gender. According to Goliath, these femicides are “a violence of ambivalence, a disavowal of the human, through which raced, gendered and sexualised bodies remain the rapeable, killable, disposable matter of an ungrievable life” (Gabrielle Goliath 2022d).

Goliath’s media choices include photography, sound, multi-track audio-visual recordings and invocational vocal performances which render agency to victims of gender-based crimes, domestic violence and femicide. Whether performative, photographed or filmed, these meticulously planned works evoke severe psychological and physical distress. I investigate Goliath’s motivations, methodologies and media choices to understand what precedes her dialogues of meaning-making. Four of Goliath’s works are included in this study, commencing with *Berenice 10-28* (2010), reprised as *Berenice 29-39* (2022). I review Goliath’s video portraits, *Personal Accounts* (2014), which address rape and domestic violence, drawing attention to the insidious, pervasive silence between perpetrators and victims. The final work, part of an ongoing performance project entitled *Elegy* (2015-present), memorialises women of colour, the weak, LGBTIQ+ victims and women who have been killed in acts of sexual and gendered violence. In conclusion, I explore *Elegy: Eunice Ntombifuthi Dube* (2018), a performance dedicated to a victim of femicide.

Although I have used video in previous work, I experiment with Goliath’s use of sound, specifically through a lament sung by Mariechan Luiters. My experimental, practice-led work is undeniably influenced by my experiences of IPV, since tacit knowledge and memories are activated by intimate items or banal domestic objects. I believe that women’s things, located within the home, serve as potent autotopographical objects.⁵

The components of the *#OverMyDeadBody* (2022)⁶ installation respond to my research on intimate partner femicide in South Africa. As such, each component of the exhibition is entitled *#OverMyDeadBody* and numbered from *I* to *IV*. I decided against naming each artwork in order to emphasise my position (that the victims *will* be remembered) and to reinforce the title of the exhibition. The installation includes small soap sculptures as memorials, modified found objects, a

5 Autotopographical describes the action of utilising objects to map the “self”. Autotopography is effected when an individual attaches meaning to an ubiquitous object that becomes significant to that person (Selman 2021).

6 Exhibited from 3 March to 15 May 2022 at the Durban Art Gallery, Durban.

performative video and a gurney draped with a death shroud concealing a speaker playing Luiters's lament.

For *#OverMyDeadBody I*, I carved replicas of femicide victims' mouths into generic Sunlight soap bars. Resting on translucent Perspex shelves, the soap bars direct the eye towards *#OverMyDeadBody II*, a tightly cropped video showing only my mouth. I name the victims, recounting their ages and how they died. The screen is positioned directly above a rug where viewers can sit, carving their responses in soap bars.

#OverMyDeadBody III comprises the installation of a suspended bed that hovers above a stained sheet. I created an ephemeral shadow of a woman from rust and soap shavings. This work specifically refers to my experience of the violence inflicted on me in the intimate space of a bedroom, normally associated with rest and tranquillity.

#OverMyDeadBody IV comprises an embroidered shroud, naming the women in gold thread, resting on a mortuary gurney. The names are embroidered in my handwriting, inserting myself into the artwork, in recognition that I could have been one of them.

1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Since trauma is conventionally deemed to be beyond representation and language, my interpretation concerns what the artworks themselves communicate about grief and mourning. Goliath and I avoid creating images of violence and loss, since these experiences are someone else's, and we avoid inflicting further violence on victims or their loved ones. As aligned with Bennett's (2005:3) notion of a philosophical realism, these artworks attempt to capture and transmit real experience without relying on an exact replica. I consider if and how these artworks 'work' in a broader socio-political context, to facilitate collective mourning. Since art engenders thought and empathy through the visual, I interrogate the political function of these works in the context of Damisch's theoretical art objects.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Within the context of absent presence, how do traumatic memory and tacit knowledge impact the artists' work, advancing grief and veneration of these unknown women?

How do the artists articulate the absent presence and residual memory of the victims?

Which methodologies impact the artists' narratives of traumatic memory in being and presence, as mechanisms that express materialised absence?

What are the roles of practical methodologies in artistic expressions of GBV?

How do these promote the expression of tacit knowledge and act as agents of change?

To what extent do the selected artworks conform with Damisch's notion of theoretical art objects?

1.5 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

Bennett's book, *Empathic vision: affect, trauma and art* (2005) is seminal to this study. Although Bennett's work analyses art from global conflict zones, including South Africa, it focuses on visual art's distinctive ability to communicate traumatic memory without resorting to a testimonial function. Her discussion of how sensation and affect express traumatic experience, the fundamental questions of "what art itself might tell us about the lived experience and memory of trauma" and what art "does", are important concepts in this study (Bennett 2005:2).

She articulates how art engenders critical thought and empathy, becoming politically impactful. The second significant source is Bal's book, *Of what one cannot speak: Doris Salcedo's political art* (2010). Bal uses several works by Salcedo to address the politics of memory, featuring Damisch's concept of the theoretical art object to include history, death and grief. Importantly, Bal (2010:2) determines that art and politics are inseparable: she explicates where art's political efficacy is located, how it wields agency and outlines its ultimate political purpose in society. Bal allows Salcedo's artworks to 'speak' and in return delivers a convincing analysis.

I investigate how Goliath and I draw on the affective truth of traumatic memory and associated tacit knowledge, and how these factors impact our media choices. Barrett (2007) determines that although personal issues and previous experience motivate creative experimentation, the instinctive sense-activity – or tacit knowledge – is influenced by art and the handling of ubiquitous objects. Both our methodologies articulate the absent presence of victims through narratives of traumatic memory, foregrounding them in the present as signifiers of materialised absence.

As pertains to the question of the significance of practical methodologies and their ability to act as agents of change in art related to GBV, Goliath and I have experienced similar viewer responses to our work. Whether the viewer conveys personal experience or not, the works engender sensation and an affective response. An analysis of Goliath's work and mine will establish the extent to which our artworks are aligned with Damisch's conception of theoretical art objects.

I investigate selected works by Goliath to understand how these speak of absent presence and present absence, transcending the mourning and grief for a particular woman to become significant in a wider socio-political context. My work is influenced by the realisation that I could have become a victim, so I am determined that these women will not be disposed of and forgotten. In this respect, I am influenced by Bracha Ettinger's conception of "wit(h)nessing", a neological extension of witnessing (a crime) to something that, for me, is being with and remembering for another through the creative act (Pollock 2010:831).

The practical methodologies we use generate affective responses. Goliath has been approached by viewers who wish to share their experiences. At my exhibition, I was approached by women and girls who had experienced IPV, while young men came to speak to me with tears in their eyes, since they were unaware of the extent of femicides in South Africa.

Drawing on the texts of Damisch (1998), Bal (2005) and van Alphen (2007), I assess the extent to which the artworks conform to Damisch's notion of a theoretical art object. He asserts that it is inadequate to write a history of the art object, since it necessitates theoretical contemplation: "if you agree to accept it on theoretical terms, it will produce effects around itself. It's a theoretical object because it forces us to ask ourselves what theory is. It is posed in theoretical terms; it produces theory; and it necessitates a reflection on theory" (Damisch 1998:8). Van Alphen (2005:191) advances an interdisciplinary approach between visual

art and culture through wider social practices than either art history or literary studies. He interprets Damisch's theoretical art object as a type of writing about art objects and their cultural agency, referring to art that 'thinks'. Bal (2010:15) states that it is imperative to discuss art that operates as a theoretical object in sufficient detail that the viewer can make the connection between thought and art from a political perspective.

A traumatic loss cannot be transferred from its primary mourners but, through art, it becomes transactional. Bennett (2005:50) uses "antiphony" as an expression of mourning to describe the transference and politics of art relating to grief. A sense-memory enables one to draw on a procedure that subsumes the past in an endless mediation of a present that is indefinably linked with the past. This sense-memory is not about speaking out but of speaking out of the body in sustained sensation. "Sense memory doesn't just present the horrific scene, the graphic spectacle of violence, but the physical imprint of the ordeal of violence: a (compromised and compromising) position to see *from*" [own emphasis] (Bennett 2005:38).

1.6 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

The theoretical framework is primarily based on Bennett's (2005) theory concerning art and trauma and cultural theorist, Bal (2010) since their work is fundamental to the study. The concerns are as follows: the articulation of absent presence in art, traumatic memory, grievability, mourning and naming. Bal reveals how art works as a 'theoretical object' requiring contemplation about history, erasure, grief and death. Art and trauma theorist Bennett's focus concerns a new understanding of trauma through the language of visual art. She determines that, through empathy, individuals might connect with those 'others' whose experiences we do not know. Bal and Bennett discuss the political function of artworks.

Using Salcedo's work, Bal (2010:251) argues that protest, resistance and grievance are associated with non-narrative artworks that invoke a history through traces, allusions of representation and the activation of space. Bal guides the viewer into personal encounters with political artworks, suggesting that these works should be regarded as 'theoretical objects', demanding reflection on history, death, erasure and grief. Bal's explanation of how political art functions led to Damisch's notion of the theoretical art object. Van Alphen expands on Damisch's theory, referring to 'affective art,' and 'thinking art': a type of art that *transcends the personal to become social* [own emphasis] (Van Alphen 2008:21). Van Alphen posits that affect is not

subjective but social, a situation where artists use a personal voice to transcend didactic, assertive modes of communication (Van Alphen 2008:21).

The transmission of affect by art objects concerns how these impact us as active agents in the social and cultural world. Because of humanism, we are sceptical that objects can be active agents because, beyond human subjectivity, we regard everything as passive, material and inanimate. Van Alphen (2008:25) argues that affect is not psychological, because if that were the case, it would prevent the art objects from transmitting affect. According to Deleuze, the encounter between affect and thought, the 'encountered sign' is felt rather than perceived or recognised, a catalyst for profound thought rather than rational study. These are "impressions which force us to look, encounters which force us to interpret, expressions which force us to think ..." (Bennett 2005:7). Deleuze posits that philosophical thought is arbitrary, abstract and based on the conventional: as modes of thought, art and literature (sensation) compete with philosophy (thought) (Van Alphen 2008:22).

My artmaking is practice-led and aligned with material thinking. According to Tonkinwise (2008:2), the knowledge generated by making cannot be detached from its precise context unlike codifiable knowledge which can be communicated because it is universal. My experiential knowledge of IPV, abutted by traumatic memory and tacit knowledge instinctively influences my media choices. I researched the link between residual memory and tacit knowledge through Barrett (2007) and Tonkinwise (2008). In practice-led art focusing on absent presence, traumatic memory and tacit knowledge manifest as empathy. Neither Goliath nor I need to 'know' the women or 'be there' to experience the empathy associated with Ahmed's contention of not knowing the other's pain but experiencing an ethical response. Barrett (2007:115) states that since creative arts research is frequently motivated by personal issues, it is manifested through experiential knowledge, a convergence of knowledge, practice and aesthetics. An artist's experience is inextricably bound up with daily life where materials are handled, thought about and felt. Barrett states that the process of art practice as research is an intensification of mundane experience that engenders a new 'knowing'. These sensory activities extend beyond sight and touch, becoming multi-sensory (Barrett 2007:115).

Sullivan (2005) determines that art research is not aligned with accepted research practices including the sciences, social sciences and humanities – the construction of art-making knowledge and the theories generated must be undertaken on art's

own terms. Most significantly, Sullivan states that all artworks are essentially theoretical statements and interpretations of lived experience. One must speak from a position grounded in contemporary art practice if we are to effectively promote the validity and value of art as a form of inquiry (in Thompson 2006:3, 6). Since my work is practice-led, I researched Orozco's 'thing ontology'. She argues that in protest art, objects can be more effective than human presence (Orozco 2017). This is significant to my work since I often use banal household objects and women's items.

I reviewed traumatic memory, commencing with Caruth's (1996:4) contention that, foundational to trauma theory, pain cannot be expressed through language or representation. Pederson rejects this post-structuralist trauma theory, saying "traumatic amnesia is a myth, and while victims may choose not to speak of their traumas, there is little evidence that they cannot" (Pederson in Meretoja 2020:25). Huyssen (2003:110) speaks of 'memory sculpture' as something which powerfully engraves a corporeal memory into a work situated in a gallery rather than in a vast public space since it addresses the individual rather than a community. Irrespective of whether it is collective or generational, the experience and pain of lived memory is found in discrete bodies. Huyssen (2003:110) cites Nietzsche, saying "Only that which does not cease to hurt remains in memory". Artists working with absence displace the past into the present, encouraging the viewer to surpass the physical presence of the artwork, engaging with its trans-historicity (Huyssen 2003:111).

In *The force of non-violence: an ethico-political bind* (2020), Butler writes that if one opposes violence inflicted on a living being, it is because that life is valued as 'liveable'. Were that life injured or lost, it would be worthy of grief. Misogyny, xenophobia, poverty and dispossession are some of the reasons that not all lives are deemed liveable or grievable (Butler 2020). In her commencement speech at Grinnell University, Butler remarked that "[a]n ungrievable life is one that cannot be mourned because it has never lived, that is, it has never counted as a life at all" (Butler 2008). Butler's contention that some lives are more grievable than others supports Das's (2008:284) concern with a socio-political contract that subordinates women, whereby sexual and reproductive violence are concealed within patriarchal norms.

1.7 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research is qualitative in nature. It applies literary and textual analyses and auto-ethnographic practice-led strategies informed by my experiences of IPV. Firstly, the research methodology comprised data collection of South African women killed by femicide: their ages, locations and the manner of their death, obtained from news reports and online media. The second phase involved an exploration of Goliath's work to find artworks pertaining to IPV and femicide. This was followed by a literature review of current scholarship on traumatic memory, tacit knowledge, grievability and the function of art concerning grief. After the research process, I commenced making art through experiments using banal household items and found objects.

I used Sunlight soap bars to sculpt the mouths of femicide victims, since it is used by most racial and socio-economic groups. During this process, my mother passed away. I purchased a shroud from the funeral home and began to inscribe victims' names on it. These were subsequently embroidered in gold thread. During my investigation of Goliath's works, I decided to experiment with her media, resulting in a video performance, naming the women and recounting their manner of death. I found an abandoned, rusted double bed and placed an old sheet under the mattress in the garden. I sprayed it with a saltwater solution every day, a ritual performed over a two-month period. Inspired by the vocal performances of *Elegy* (2015-), I asked a contemporary singer, Mariechan Luiters, to create a lament. As a survivor of IPV, she focused on her experiences as she improvised the musical piece that accompanies *#OverMyDeadBody IV*.

1.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

I am familiar with *The policy on research ethics of Unisa* (2014) and agree to uphold and strictly conform to Unisa's internationally approved principals, moral values and ethical standards. This study attempts to benefit South African society and contribute to critical thought in the field of IPV and femicide. The practical work accompanying this dissertation has not been forced to conform to the theoretical position outlined in this research. As aligned with Unisa's research requirements, my values are based on autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence and justice. I have not approached family or friends of the deceased. Since my information regarding the victims and their manner of death is obtained solely through media reports, it falls within the category of the common domain. The investigation of Goliath's

work is guided by published articles, her artist's statements, website and an informal conversation. Due to the nature of my research application, my research was approved by the Unisa Ethics Committee.

1.9 CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Chapter two unpacks the concepts underpinning the study by means of the problem statement, research questions and keywords.

Chapter three focuses on works by Goliath, namely *Berenice 10-28* (2010), *Berenice 29-39* (2022), *Personal Accounts* (2014) and the collaborative *Elegy* performance devoted to Eunice Ntombifuthi Dube (2018). I examine Goliath's media, methods and motivations to establish what precedes her dialogues of meaning-making in her articulations of absent presence.

Chapter four discusses my installation, *#OverMyDeadBody* (2022). As an immersive experience in a dimly illuminated purple room, one work leads to the next. Inspired by a practice-led approach, in which I seek household objects to 'speak' to my concepts, I explore the reasons for my media choices and methodologies.

The concluding chapter compares Goliath's strategies with mine to establish the ways in which we speak of the absent presence of femicide victims. It implements the summarised findings of the research problem and research questions.

CHAPTER 2 THEORETICAL RATIONALE

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores the key words as a lens to the theoretical perspectives of the research. Post-structuralist theory advances the idea that trauma transcends representation and language. And yet, Caruth (1995), Felman (1992) and Krog (1998) have been charged with arrogating the evidence of trauma victims (Bennett 2005:6). Goliath and I avoid images of violence or loss. Not wishing to inflict further distress on victims, survivors or their families, we rely on the artworks themselves to communicate grief and mourning. Due to their determinations of how art ‘works’, I rely primarily on the voices of Bal (2010), Barrett (2007), Bennett (2005), Damisch (1998) and van Alphen (2005).

The artworks apprehend and convey authentic experience without resorting to an illustrative representation (Bennett 2005:3). It is important to consider how these artworks ‘work’ in a broader socio-political context, facilitating a type of collective mourning. Since art engenders critical thought through its visual capabilities, I evaluate the political efficacy of these works. Finally, I assess whether the artworks conform to Damisch’s ‘theoretical art object’ producing their own theory, provoking, enticing and compelling thought (Bal 2010:8). I apply the theory under the headings of the keywords of the study, since these are fundamental to the research problem and the research questions.

2.2 KEYWORDS

2.2.1 Absent presence

Through art, Goliath and I attempt to create the paradoxical notion of the absent presence of femicide victims. As with Goliath’s *Elegy* (2015 -) performances, Bennett (2005:10) states that affect is not reliant on people but on places, since communal mourning does not rely on the identificatory subject. Bal (2010:18) too speaks of the difference between a singular relationship between viewer and artwork, and yet alludes to the possibility of a “metaphoric extension” to other spaces. Goliath and I attempt to transmit real experiences, creating work that facilitates empathy, grief and collective mourning. Bal (2010:18) speaks of the trace, something avoiding actual representation and yet serving as a reminder

of previous suffering, a life. So, the effect of absent presence may be limited to an encounter between a single viewer and the work, or as a collective mourning process that extends beyond the original subject and viewers.

Goliath and I draw on tacit knowledge, a type of internal 'knowing' from handling objects and thinking 'through' them. Tonkinwise (2008:1), the proponent of material thinking says: "Makers know. They know or feel like they know when they are making something new ... feeling like one knows, lets making happen". For me, this material thinking is often brought on by ordinary items with which I experiment, sometimes successfully and sometimes not. But as with Tonkinwise's statement, I get excited and become absorbed when I do not know the outcome, but when I feel that it will work. In Goliath's case, she uses audio-visual, digital and analogue media to coax presence from absence through ritual, invocation and silence. Although Goliath's memorials inspire her to recreate and recognise an individual, her works encourage collective mourning through recorded performances exhibited in various locations. Although our methodologies are different, we use traumatic memory in being and presence to activate material absence.

Memories of past trauma enable us to draw on a process in which the past is subsumed in a dialogue between the then and now, impacting our response to these abused women. Bal (2010:3) opines that an artist can burnish the past into the present, blocking any attempt to forget. She states that art can "construct, solicit and enforce a gaze that, in spite of the fragility of its merely passing caress, will itself bear the traces of the horror encrusted, scarred or entombed in the work". Bennett (2005:38) claims that sense-memory is not limited to speaking about something, it is about speaking out of one's body in a continued response. Of course, a traumatic loss cannot be removed (or claimed) from its primary mourners, but art makes it transactional (Bennett 2005:50). Aligned with the idea of absent presence and a present past, the transferral and politics of art about grief requires a social antiphony – a call and response – of mourning.

2.2.2 Traumatic memory

When experience is recognised, memory is created. Bennett cites Janet (2005:23) stating that traumatic experience causes cognitive systems to recoil and resist, so the event is inimical to both memory and thought. Instead, it is bound to unconscious, involuntary repetition. Although it is convenient to refer to

traumatic memory, frequently the person is incapable of constructing the required narrative or memory about the event. Van der Kolk (in Bennett 2005:23) writes extensively about the notion that trauma withstands psychological and aesthetic interpretation, due to somatic reactions that transcend verbal-semantic-linguistic representation.

Since Goliath and I have been deeply impacted by traumatic memories of violence, these recollections create an internalised affect which manifests through the physical action of art making. Bennet (2005:23) acknowledges a lengthy engagement between the arts and affect as an immediate dynamic, oscillating between the object and the viewer, enabling both the artist and the viewer to become spectators of their own feelings. Bennett determines that an artwork which mediates affect, sensation and traumatic memory cannot be reduced to a mere representation. The work conveys “subjective processes that exceed our ability to represent them, certain of its features might be understood as ... traumatic memory” (Bennett 2005:23). Eschewing a clinical symptomology that would render the artwork as an illustrative representation of the memory, image activates the experience. Bennett treats the categories between traumatic and ‘normal’ memory as conditional, variable and expansive due to their mutually constitutive origins and how these are spread through the production of art (Bennett 2005:24).

2.2.3 Tacit knowledge

In an article entitled “Experiential learning in practice as research: context, method, knowledge” Barrett (2007:115) explains that because creative arts research is often inspired by personal or emotional concerns, it is manifested through experience or tacit knowledge: a place where knowledge, practice and aesthetics converge to produce a new ‘knowing’. In her doctoral thesis, Gwenneth Miller (2015:20) aligns tacit knowledge with the intuitive making process, saying that “tacit knowledge can often not be fully ‘explained’: for example, when artists work, they ‘lose’ themselves and manipulate material and images intuitively in the process.” It therefore links with an embodied understanding of media, its application and a contextual understanding. In chapters three and four, I identify how tacit knowledge impacts the art work under discussion, partially addressing research question one to consider how artists deal with traumatic memory. Shusterman (in Barrett 2007:116) writes that the artist-researcher must establish the link between daily life and the aesthetic to demonstrate art’s power to generate

knowledge. Barrett (2007:117-8) cites Dewey, who proposes that the artist's experience generates a positive or negative emotional response from which conscious purpose emerges. Experience is primarily emotional and sensory, only then is it intellectually contemplated. Sensory interactions direct thought, which is processed through signs and symbols that become alternatives for the emotions experienced. According to Bennett (2007:118), although science and art are both subject to experience, the artist focuses on the sensuous object whereas the scientist is directed by mathematical symbols, measurement and cerebral concepts – or explicit, universal knowledge.

2.2.4 Naming

Naming the dead is normally undertaken on plaques, tombstones or in the case of political conflict, public memorials. The way in which the dead women are named by Goliath is unconventional and innovative. It retaliates against the persistent belief that men can inflict violence or kill women as punishment. I believe our naming strategies are more potent due to the activist perspective.

My research on femicide victims and what happened to them affects me for several days after each reading. I am forced to stop the research and make art as an embodied and performative ritual of naming until I can continue reading again. I carefully carve the victims' mouths, endeavouring to express each woman's expression as accurately as possible (see chapter four). The women cannot speak, but by incising their names on the reverse of the soap bars, I feel that I am creating acts of deeper memory since the viewer must be close enough to smell the soap and read the name – requiring a certain intimacy from these small counter-memorials. I also articulate their names in my video, *#OverMyDeadBody II*, which confronts the viewer as a painful enactment of reverence and rebellion.

Delbo (in Bennett 2005:25) differentiates between two types of memory that are pertinent to this discussion: “deep memory” or “sense memory”, something that evades memory proper and “ordinary memory” which is representational and popularly understood. Although we do not know these women, Goliath and I are both deeply affected by the loss of a flesh-and-blood woman and attempt to restore her absent presence through naming and memorialising her. This act reclaims her subjectivity in some way, redeeming her from being relegated to just another anonymous victim of IPV.

Every work by Goliath included in this dissertation names the victim: from her childhood friend *Berenice* (2010, 2022), to Brenda, Charmaine, Mercia, Christolene and Zipho in *Personal Accounts* (2014) and finally, Eunice Ntombifuthi Dube in *Elegy* (2018). She maintains that her work is dedicated to the reconstruction and restoration of the subjectivities of those who are killed, objectified, discarded and forgotten. The performative nature of Goliath's work drives the naming into a deep memory, ritualistic in nature. In identifying naming in such a manner, I address the third research question as this is one of the methodologies applied in the artists' narratives of traumatic memory.

2.2.5 Grievability and mourning

At a speech delivered at Grinnell University, Butler (2008) interrogated public responses to wars fought far from home. She proposed that humans should ask: "Whose lives are considered valuable? Whose lives we mourn, and whose lives are considered 'ungrievable?'" Butler (2008) determines that an ungrievable life cannot be mourned because it has never lived: it has never counted as a life at all. In answer to question 4, I believe that the practical methodologies Goliath and I use cause affect and thought, responses that can effect change.

Pain. Grief. Mourning. Words associated with death, particularly unexpected, unnatural death. How does one comprehend the idea that affective trauma enters a body, rather than as grief emanating from a body? We think of grief as a private, internal matter that must be worked through. Das (in Bennett 2005:49) affirms the agency of pain itself: "In the register of the imaginary, the pain of the other not only seeks a home in language but also in the body". Pain either instinctively affects one or reveals a lack of affect and an inability to demonstrate it. According to Bennett (2005:49) if this is the language of pain – and grief is pain – then it is found at the juncture between the body and the outside. Freud (in Bennett 2005:47) argues that trauma is not a consequence of loss but rather a lack of affect which can only be recovered in the presence of an empathic witness. Das (Bennett 2005:49) counters the psychoanalytic interpretations of successful mourning as a decathexis¹ for those lost to the social realm, whereas she proposes that it profoundly changes individuals and societies. Das (Bennett 2005:49) proposes that we should extend the conception of pain as confined within a subject to its impact on the world and confirms that pain has a palpable extension within the world.

¹ In psychoanalytic theory, decathexis is the withdrawal of libido (love, pleasure, sexual desire) from objects (other people) in the external world (Dictionary.apa.org).

Since Goliath records the *Elegy* performances which have been exhibited internationally, the works facilitate a collective mourning severed from the original subject or site. The *Elegy* performances create a space for communal grief and mourning, irrespective of culture or nationality. An absent body is personalised, and mourning becomes both social and productive (Kimani 2018).

2.2.6 The theoretical art object

Damisch (1998:8), originator of the phrase “theoretical art object”, explains that the art object is something that obliges one to do theory but offers the means of doing it. The art object surrounds itself with effects that oblige the viewer to question what theory is. Considered from this point of view, it creates its own theory and compels contemplation of theory.

Bal (2010:7) writes that political art is mobile, reliant on singular viewer encounters, and as such becomes the product of collaboration and dialogue. Bal (2010:7) explains that when the works, their viewers and the temporal frame converge, “a compelling collective thought process emerges”. She cautions that descriptions of theoretical art objects should be limited to their capacity to bond thought and art within the political, even when the producer may not agree with the interpretation (Bal 2010:15). She determines that this speaking ‘through’ artworks is what Damisch refers to when he outlines the multiple connections between the theoretical art object and the theorisation that it compels, stimulates and facilitates.

Bal (2010:73) argues that theoretical art objects are, by definition, political because they empower the agency of viewers. When this agency is confronted by the appalling consequences of violence, it is made political. When I carve the mouths of the dead it is traumatic but the reaction between the work and the viewer in the gallery makes it worthwhile. The proximity between the viewer and the soap sculpture erases detachment, engendering affect and making a socio-political connection.

Bal differentiates between politics and the political because they are oppositional. Bal (2010:10) cites Mouffe, establishing that “the political” refers to a degree of opposition within societies, whereas “politics” refers to the institutions that classify human existence within the discord created by the political. “Politics” reconciles opposition, suppressing conflict but leaving it to ignite.

Goliath's work and mine protests a political system that pays lip service to increasing GBV, without implementing any effective solutions. Feminist politics are unable to exclude the personal arena of bodies, reproduction, mortality and associated issues (Brown in Bal 2010:14). These areas are messy and cluttered, breached and reconstituted. Consequently, there is no possibility of a universal language over a perpetual, political and partial understanding of accepted cultural differences. These are seldom 'resolved' leaving words to suggest and evoke although they cannot transmit meanings (Bal 2010:14).

Van Alphen (2005:192) calls the theoretical art object, "art that thinks". Art, in its specific timeframe stimulates questions, be they general, transhistorical or philosophical, affirming the aesthetics of art as agency. Van Alphen suggests that visual culture is a type of writing about cultural objects whereby their agency is acknowledged. This is analogous with the interdisciplinary strategy of visual and cultural studies.

Van Alphen (2005:193) is quick to point out that art as a way of thinking does not guarantee comprehension, since aesthetic experience always commences as an attempt at understanding. He explains that non-aesthetic art is based on the identification of signifiers and their embedded meanings, whereas aesthetic art is devoid of these signifiers. The viewer questions what, if anything, the art object means. This is true of Goliath's work and mine. At first glance, perhaps it does not 'mean' anything. It requires time and thought to draw conclusions. Van Alphen states that it is this autonomy that grants aesthetic art its agency. If art compels the viewer to think with it, it serves as a frame for cultural thought.

Van Alphen (2005:196) states that Damisch's conception of art as a form of thinking must be considered from two viewpoints. Firstly, the viewer thinks with the artwork, stimulating a dialogue and questions that might be philosophical, political or social. Only when the viewer considers these questions does the artwork relinquish its ideas. Secondly, the historical circumstances of the work can only be truly understood when the work is comprehended as an historical expression of an underlying problem.

In conclusion, Damisch believes that cultural objects serve an intellectual or political function. He rejects the idea that artworks function as impassive displays of a certain cultural or historical period. He negates the idea that the art object is the result of an artist's intention: the artist thinks in the work.

Consequently, the artwork is a reflection, not as a mirror image but as a dynamic act of thought (Van Alphen 2005:194).

This chapter briefly outlines the key concepts associated with the research problem, namely what the artworks communicate about absent presence, traumatic memory, tacit knowledge, naming, grief and mourning. I consider how art transmits authentic experience without relying on an exact replica, and how it 'works' as concerns collective mourning. Since art engenders thought and empathy, I assess the function of these works in the context of Damisch's theoretical art objects. This chapter establishes a link between the keywords, the research questions and the theorists who underpin the study, providing a foundation to the analysis of Goliath's works.

CHAPTER 3 GABRIELLE GOLIATH

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Building on the key words discussed in the previous chapter, this chapter investigates how Goliath's work is aligned with the problem statement, specifically with the strategies used to visualise trauma through absent presence. Since trauma is conventionally deemed to be beyond representation and language, I interpret what the artworks themselves communicate about grief and mourning. As stated in the research problem in chapter one, the selected artworks attempt to capture and transmit genuine experience without relying on an exact replication of the event. I analyse and compare how these artworks enable affect and residual memory to potentially act as agents of change.

I consider Goliath's media choices in her works that function as acts of mourning: photography, videography, live performance, lighting and sound. Her creative strategies address gendered crimes, domestic violence and femicide, foregrounding specific victims and their stories. Goliath materialises presence from the absence of victims through naming, invocation, ritual and silence. She creates narratives of memory, located in the present, to articulate the socially mandated silence between perpetrators and victims of GBV.

I approach each research question through the description and analysis of a specific artwork, establishing the theoretical link with Goliath's praxis. The conclusionary remarks discuss the extent to which Goliath's selected works conform to Damisch's notion of the "theoretical art object".

3.2 BACKGROUND

Goliath acknowledges that her work is founded on an ethics of representation inspired by the shooting death of a school friend when she was in primary school (Gabrielle Goliath 2022b). As an adult and artist, Goliath questioned how to work in the aftermath of this violence: a violence that created such a finality – an irrevocable, systematic erasure.

Goliath's work exposes the callous treatment of black and brown women, non-binary and transgender individuals. Politically, it does far more than merely explain the commonplace, methodical brutality that is concealed beneath ordinary

behaviour (Jayawardane 2019). According to Goliath, art provides an important, critical medium for essential dialogue and social commentary. As a South African woman artist, she believes that it is an honour and her duty to address topics that concern her countrywomen, hence her work is inspired by the socio-political realm (Sargent 2016).

Goliath works with the historical and current situations of those women who are subject to race-based segregation and the sexual violence that continues to dominate post-colonial and post-apartheid lived experience (Goodman Gallery 2019). She acknowledges that she works with disturbing, confidential matter that she hopes might engender compassion for another. Her work is committed to creating relatable empathic encounters, and most importantly, to counter an indifferent response to the victims with one that restores their agency (Sargent 2016). Goliath's chapter in *Acts of transgression: contemporary life art in South Africa*¹ (2019) facilitates a deeper understanding of her theoretical position and the politics underpinning her artwork. Goliath rejects the fallacy of national reconciliation and transformation over a specifically South African, decolonial context. She contends that irresolution is paramount in the context of both historical and contemporary traumatic situations (Goliath in Pather and Bouille 2019:131). During colonisation black bodies were – and continue to be – an object site of violence and objectification (Goliath in Pather and Bouille 2019:125).

Although Goliath's work reveals the callousness with which women, queer and transgender people are treated, it is not limited to drawing attention to the systematic and systemic violence. She is not interested in exposing that which we, as individuals and as a nation, are unwilling to confront by 'creating awareness' of patriarchal and state violence. Her works do more than simply draw attention to victimhood. In a recent interview with Hamelo (2022), Goliath observes:

It is not a work of exceptionalism but one that recognises that to undo the crisis-norm of sexualised, racialised, patriarchal violence, and to realise the world differently requires that each and every one of us recognise our implication within a world of others, and the bearing that implies – across difference, across borders, across our capacity to 'relate' – indeed, across all that may otherwise separate (and 'exonerate') us.

Goliath states that her life's work is that of mourning, and yet she remains hopeful that the world will change the violence that continues to subjugate and obliterate

¹ The chapter is entitled "'A Different Kind of Inhabitation': Invocation and the Politics of Mourning in Performance Work by Tracey Rose and Donna Kukama" in *Acts of transgression: contemporary life art in South Africa* (2019) edited by Jay Pather and Catherine Bouille.

lives. Goliath calls for a society that will “bear with us those lost to, or still surviving an order of violence we hope to and must transform” (Goodman Gallery 2019).

This section includes selected works by Goliath commencing with the *Last Seen* (2010) exhibition, featuring *Berenice 10-28*, works which were reprised in 2022 as *Berenice 29-39*. Goliath creates platforms with the almost concealed words from a Christmas carol in the foreground of the *Berenice 10-28* images. Last seen – never to be seen again – a child’s introduction to death. My interpretation of these works is sustained by theory that supports the research question: within absent presence, how does traumatic memory and tacit knowledge advance veneration and grief? Furthermore, how does Goliath articulate the residual memory and absent presence of Berenice?

3.3 ***BERENICE 10-28 (2010), BERENICE 29-39 (2022)***

Berenice, a name spoken over me, into me, never to be mine, and yet mine and of my heart – to be borne, as part of me and to be shared ... On Christmas Eve 1991, news came of a not-so-silent night. Berenice, my childhood friend, was dead; shot at home in what was spoken of after – when spoken of at all – as a ‘domestic incident’. The next day, my mother took me over to their house to share our condolences with the family. On seeing me her mother hailed me, calling out a name – not Gabrielle, but Berenice – and then held me so tight and for so long.

(Gabrielle Goliath 2022b)

According to Goliath, the facts of the event are only known by the family members who were present. The reason for the shooting was not disclosed, perhaps due to the stigma, a fear of reprisal or personal trauma. Due to the complicit silence and concealment surrounding Berenice’s death, this type of violence, where she was “physically violated and symbolically erased” is inevitably perpetuated (Jayawardane 2019). As an adult artist, Goliath questioned how she could work with the systematic erasure and absence of a specific person in a way that would honour Berenice’s memory without using her death for an instrumental purpose. Goliath was determined to respond to the specifics of Berenice’s death, beyond the actual event, as an extension of the violence in families and society (Jayawardane 2019).

The *Last Seen* (2010) exhibition features a rectangular lightbox suspended by metal cables affixed to the ceiling, precisely above an identical platform on the gallery floor. Conventionally, a lightbox uses LED technology to vibrantly illuminate,

enhancing one's vision. In contrast with the luminous view from a lightbox, this one is covered by a sinuous, soft fabric, neatly tucked in and concealing the raised words "all is calm" (Gabrielle Goliath 2019).



Fig 1. Gabrielle Goliath, *Last Seen* installation view (2010).

This contrasts with the shiny black lower platform, reflecting the photographic portraits on the wall. Concealed beneath the suspended platform, the words "all is bright" (in reverse type) twinkle in what appear to be Christmas lights, reflecting on the impermeable lower surface (Gabrielle Goliath 2019). There is a potential for imminent violence: the suspended platform could smash down, obliterating the fragile "all is bright" in an instant, like the lid of a tomb, destroying the message and the light. Of course, "all is calm" might remain, barely visible, alluding to how the ubiquitous daily horror of violence is concealed.

Although Berenice was a child who was murdered in an act of domestic violence, it speaks volumes about how the lives of women and children are regarded.

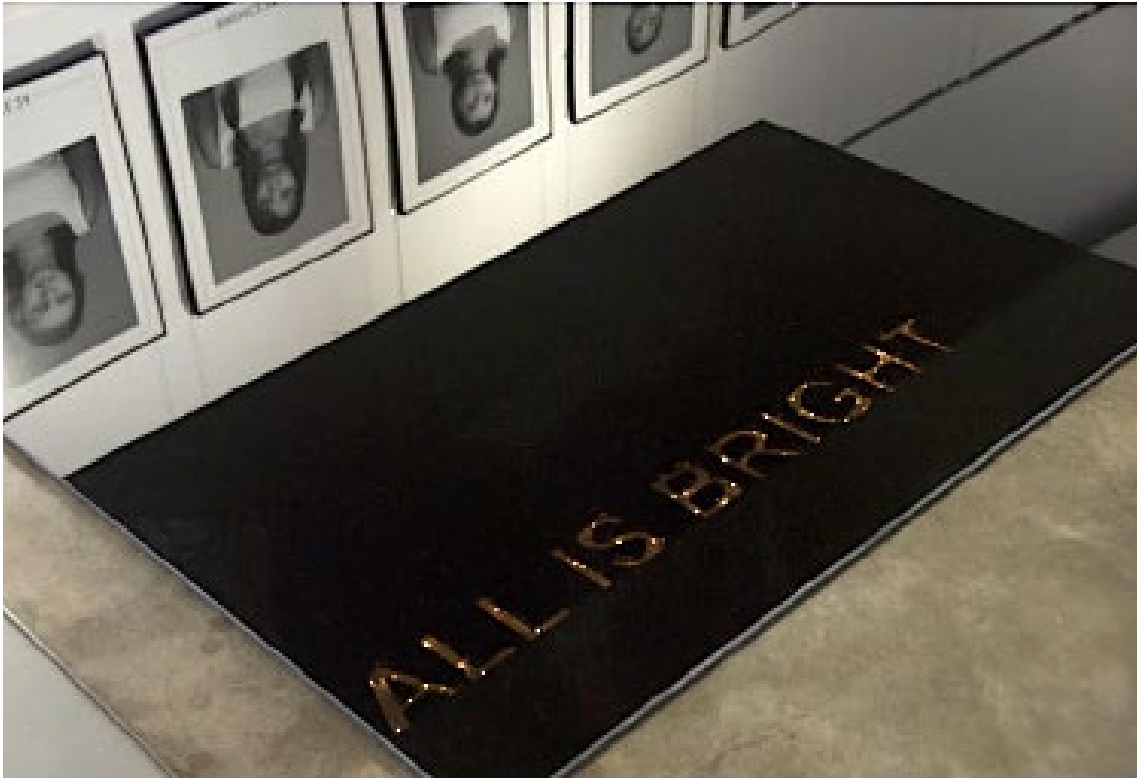


Fig 2. Gabrielle Goliath, *Last Seen* installation view (2010).

The words “all is calm” and “all is bright” are taken from the lyrics of the Christmas carol, *Silent Night*. The carol is a world-famous celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ, held by his mother Mary. The lyrics refer to shepherds who worshipped Him beneath a brilliant star in the night sky, shining above the stable in which He was born. The theme is of wonder, love, humility and worship. Berenice’s mother, who may also have held her child, could not save her and will mourn her child’s death for the rest of her life.



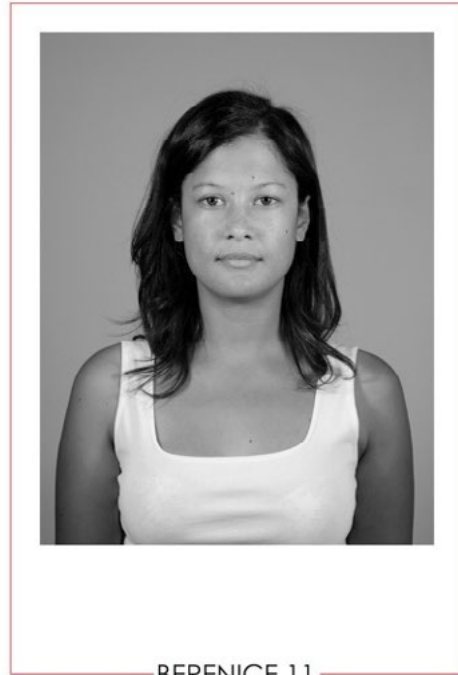
Fig 3. Gabrielle Goliath, *Last Seen* exhibition view (2010).

Behind the platforms, a wall is covered with evenly spaced black and white portraits. Each photograph is surrounded by a thin red line, broken by the name *Berenice* and a number from 10 to 28, the figure numbers representing the 19 years since Berenice's death. Goliath's bureaucratically styled images of unsmiling young women in black and white portraits have the same featureless background and lighting. Wearing the same white tank tops, devoid of make-up or jewellery, the subjects, likely in their twenties, stare accusingly at the viewer. Goliath herself features as *Berenice 17*, in an affective union with every woman standing in for Berenice. The sense of accusation is exacerbated by the sheer size of these images. Mounted on plain black board, the portraits literally draw one's vision across the line of faces to their challenging eyes, making the viewer overwhelmingly aware of the years.

The women selected to represent Berenice are surrogates for a dead child who would have been their age. Despite obvious similarities in the portraits, the subjects reveal their uniqueness. These young women consciously project an image that is both self and other, a defiant combination of absence and presence.



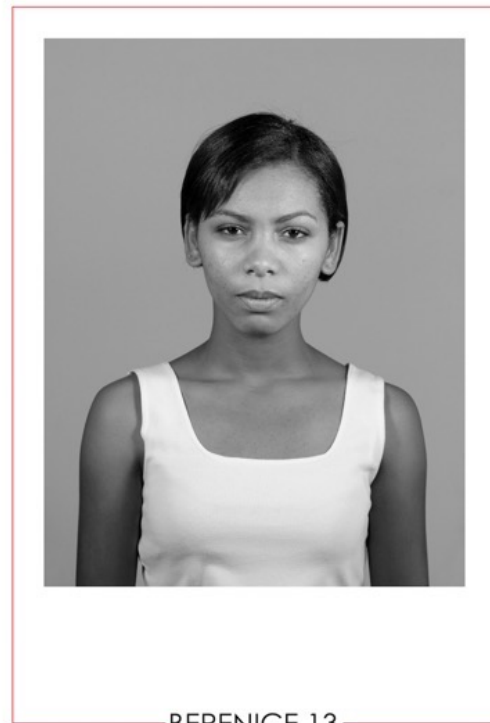
BERENICE 10



BERENICE 11



BERENICE 12



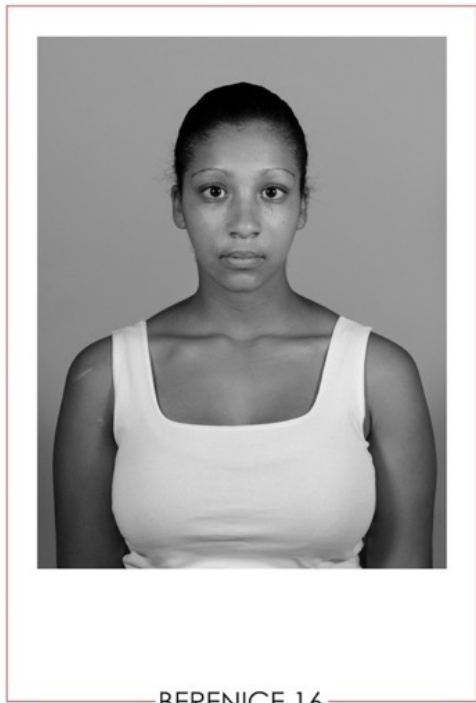
BERENICE 13



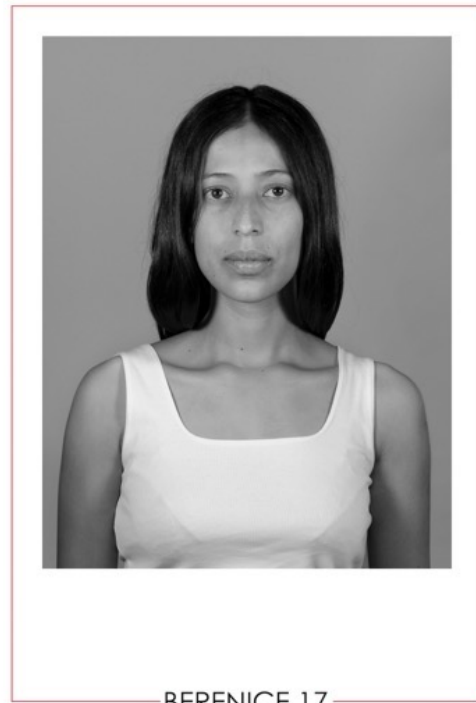
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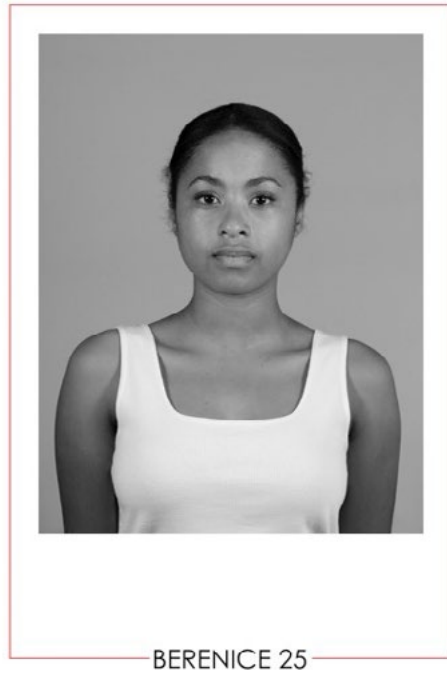


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BERENICE 17





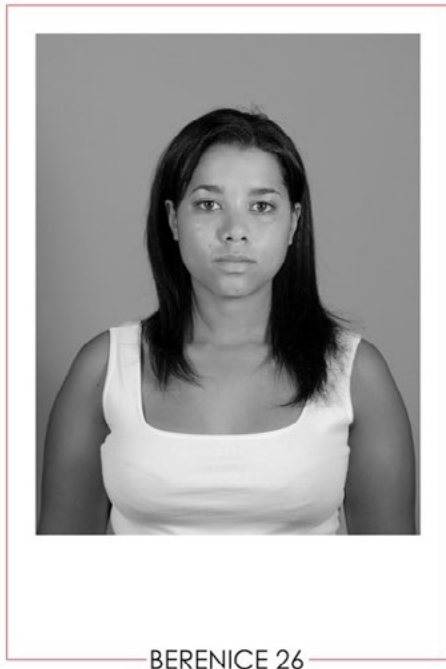


Fig 4-22. Gabrielle Goliath, *Berenice 10-28* (2010).

Goliath decided to reanimate this commemorative gesture in her “life work of mourning” during 2022 (Gabrielle Goliath 2022b). These 11 full-colour photographic portraits are unnamed, although the body of work stubbornly retains the name ‘Berenice’. The viewer establishes that these portraits function as a continued communal work of refusal. Once again, the photographic portraits are installed at eye level, but this time the expressions seem less angry and defiant. Instead, they seem to reflect a weariness and a sadness. This time, the surrogates express their individuality through headgear, spectacles, jewellery and tattoos, although they all wear the same white linen top. Perhaps the accessories reflect life choices and their experiences over time. This on-going act of mourning makes us once again reflect on another decade denied to Berenice. Through the *Berenice* portraits and her own insertion, Goliath bears witness for her friend. Goliath states that the series of photographs is “a gift to her and to all who lost her, all who did not get to know her. A gift to all lives lost, for all mourners” (McBride 2022).

I concur with Bennett (2005:3) that art can apprehend and convey real experience without relying on an exact version of events. Instead, art manipulates its distinctive abilities to partake significantly in the politics of the work. Although this work is – and is not – representational, it challenges rather than supports the distinction between art and trauma. Although Bennett (2005:4) acknowledges that art, like *Berenice*, concerns actual experience, she rejects the notion that meaning or the object of representation is prioritised over the innate qualities or form of art. This is aligned with the notion of absent presence since it requires affect, sensation and thought over mere narrative to understand the work.

Berenice died when Goliath was nine years old. Since Goliath has made it clear that the *Berenice* works form part of an ongoing, perhaps lifelong project, it is devoted to expressing her absent presence, grieving and venerating not only Berenice but enabling others who have lost loved ones to GBV and IPV to mourn through the work. I agree with Bal’s (2010:3) contention that when an artist subsumes the past into the present, it cannot be forgotten. Bal (2010:38) determines that three elements are vital to art in the contemporary world: an affective, albeit slanted encounter with the present, a refusal to eliminate the past from the present, and displacement, so characteristic of today’s world. Affect makes art compelling, without stipulating how viewers are affected. Secondly, the insertion of the past into the present makes perception an indispensable element of the process making art a memory. Bal (2010:38) proposes that displacement or “migratoriness” is

a spatial condition that increases the efficacy of art. This migrant aspect of art enables it to be seen by different audiences in different contexts in different parts of the world. After all, IPV and femicide are not limited to South Africa alone.

Yet, Bal (2010:38) determines that it is not possible to completely cut the tie between signs and reality. Although she speaks of a different artist, she maintains that even if we do not know the person, or if the person died by violence, it is important to maintain the absence that the image evokes and keep the missing body present, albeit as a presence within absence. Goliath employs traumatic memory and tacit knowledge to advance mourning, homage and residual memory as indicators of absent presence.

According to Bennett (2005:24) traditional concepts of expression fail to articulate certain artworks because they are deemed a reflection of a past psychological state, whereas in fact these works deal with memory in the present. As such, Bennett determines that it requires a premise founded on affect: the dynamic between the manufacture and the reception of the work. The Berenice portraits function, not as reminders of her suffering and death in a private capacity, but emerge from traumatic memory through various social interactions that connect the outside to the inside. This exchange is central to the connection between sense memory and common memory (Bennett 2005:32).



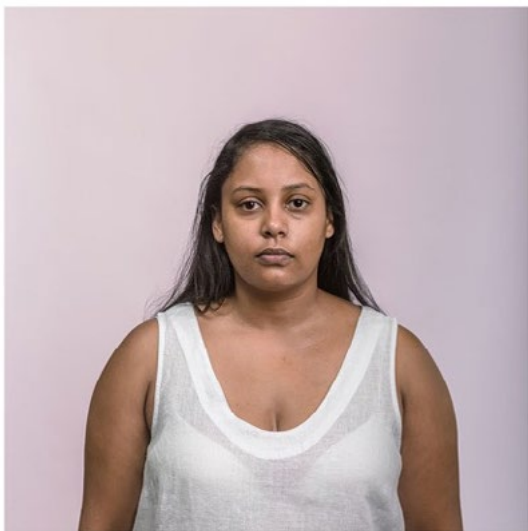
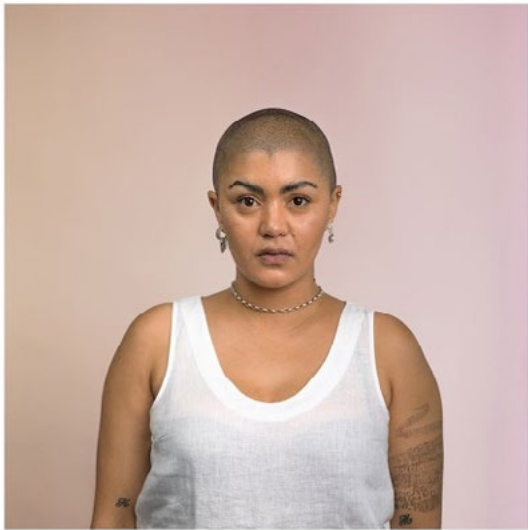




Fig 23-33. Gabrielle Goliath, *Berenice 29-39* (2022).

The lack of a speculative likeness to Berenice enables any woman to imagine herself in Berenice's position – and not only as a living surrogate. These photographs encourage viewers to contemplate the finality of Berenice's death, and that of so many other women. According to Bal (2010:18) although a political work's individuality is conserved, it can perform affectively in other locations. She states that since an artwork cannot be relegated to one specific political meaning, it favours metaphor (Bal 2010:38). Metaphor enhances meaning, confronting its audience with various predicaments of interpretation. This activates the autonomy of thought and affect required from viewers to use their social agency to its full potential. According to Bal, "What metaphor carries over is meaning but meaning

that includes its affective charges” (Bal 2010:38). The aftermath of this violence, addressed years later, draws the past and its incomprehensible absence into the present and the future through an affective, ethical and political encounter. Both the *Berenice 10-28* and *Berenice 29-39* images were installed in Zürich at the Kunsthaus Baselland from 13 May to 17 July 2022.¹

Goliath’s work is engaged in an act of ‘hopeful mourning’. She is not interested in affixing her signature to the work but uses her art to affect the world she watches (Bal 2010:7). *Berenice 10-28* (2010) and *Berenice 29-39* (2022) are inspired by the effects of residual childhood trauma and yet transcend an individual narrative function. In response to the specific act of violence against her friend, and its extension in the context of family and society, this installation inspires thought and resistance.

The following section includes *Personal Accounts* (2014), a five-channel video installation which elaborates on Goliath’s strategic use of present absence to articulate the silence between victims and perpetrators of IPV. My interpretation addresses the research question concerning the methodologies that impact Goliath’s narratives of traumatic memory in being and presence, to become mechanisms of materialised absence.

3.4 PERSONAL ACCOUNTS (2014)

Goliath reflects on Friedrich’s book, *Krieg dem Kriege* (1924), a pacifist treatise opposing war (Dodd 2014). The title of Goliath’s exhibition, *Faces of War* (2014) reminds one of the horrendously disfigured humans in Friedrich’s book, where young soldiers are blinded, maimed and have half their faces blown away. Wars continue, but Friedrich’s obscene photographs of the realities of war led Goliath to a consideration of the silent war of domestic violence at home (Mail & Guardian 2014).

Just as war is reliant on propaganda from the battlefields, likely very different from the reality, IPV remains hidden behind the closed doors of homes. There are several

¹ At the opening, three women shared their traumatic encounters with Goliath. She was also approached by a father who, after viewing the exhibition, wished to share his child’s experience. Goliath believes that the on-going dialogue of mourning expressed within the work, makes these encounters possible, enabling conversations about abuse, rape and femicide.

reasons for this concealment. There is the shame and stigma, economic reliance, the very real fear of reprisal and even the inability to walk away from someone who is loved, despite the pain they inflict. Photographs of bruised, battered wives or anonymous views of the backs of victims' heads, and, in my opinion, constant news reports 'normalise' this violence, while thousands of South African adults and children are trapped in recurrent episodes of domestic brutality (Dodd 2014).

Alexandra Dodd (2014) asks how an artist represents suffering without simply repeating it in a world smothered in violent images. She asks how the viewer remains affected by the bombardment of human suffering, despite feelings of overwhelming moral exhaustion. How does the artist connect with the pain of others without subjecting the victims to secondary victimisation through representations of that pain?

Every image in *Faces of War* is a portrait associated with IPV. Small pencil drawings are contrasted with enlarged glossy photographs and a series of videos entitled *Personal Accounts*. The exhibition puts the viewer in an uncomfortably intimate proximity to the subjects, where every pore and line is clearly visible. The artist creates a tension where the viewer becomes a possible perpetrator.

Goliath has taken a series of 12 portraits of men and women. Each photograph has had half the face excised. The remaining half has been mirrored and duplicated, the strange faces making the viewer uneasy (Dodd 2014). The 12 glossy images, an equal number of men and women, are entitled *Faces of People who may or may not be Victims or Perpetrators of Domestic Violence* (2014) and are positioned on two walls facing each other. The strange, staring subjects on the opposite wall and the audience members reflect in the glossy photographic surfaces, adding yet another layer of complicity.

Casting her subjects in doubt, since each one is a potential victim or perpetrator, the viewer wonders whether these are victims, perpetrators – or perhaps even surrogates? Domestic violence is so well concealed that not even the size of the photographs gives a clue as to the underlying narrative (Dodd 2014). These photographic portraits serve as a powerful introduction to *Personal Accounts*. The video portraits are evenly spaced alongside each other in a dark area of the gallery. Each video portrait is a tightly cropped view of each woman's face, focusing on the eyes and mouth. Devoid of sentimentality, each victim is given the agency to speak of their experiences. The work counters the chaotic violence inflicted on women with a simple, quiet response, underscoring its affect and cognition.

Goliath's strategy challenges the anonymity of this conflict through silence, made evident in the video portraits of victims of rape and IPV. "In a violent but demonstrative act of censorship, Goliath extracts the words from these personal accounts ... Goliath's problematic manipulation of the portrait seeks to visualise the unseen and 'faceless' nature of domestic violence and to articulate something of its silences" (Goodman Gallery 2023).

In the background of each video, one hears the drone of distant traffic and sees the occasional flicker of a defective neon light, recalling an interrogation. Each woman is identified by her first name: Brenda, Charmaine, Christolene, Mercia and Zipho. Goliath reinforces the silence surrounding IPV by expunging the women's testimony. Every word has been silenced, leaving only coughs, sighs and breathing. The truncated sound and large formats problematise the intimate proximity, making it deeply distressing to watch. The victims' courage and pain, their resignation and sadness confront and challenge the viewer. The women's testimony commences quite calmly, with tentative smiles that become emotional responses, where their hands flit before their faces and their breathing becomes more staccato, as if they are struggling with their emotions. While they silently 'speak', the women nervously lick their lips and compress their mouths. When they smile, one is drawn to their wounded eyes, although they seldom look directly at the camera: their gazes shift from left to right and back again.



Fig 34. Gabrielle Goliath, *Personal Accounts* installation view (2014).

It is understood that these women are not able to speak about IPV: it is as if they are ‘testifying’ in silence. The censored audio suggests a private, incomprehensible language. As a survivor of IPV, I find these video portraits extremely disturbing. The most affective of the series is the video of *Christolene*. She recounts her experience of IPV to the viewer, wiping away tears and pausing to think before continuing. The viewer cannot but be aware of her voiceless anguish, powerfully reinforcing the ‘silence’ between victims and perpetrators.



Fig 35. Gabrielle Goliath, *Personal Accounts* installation view (2014).

Goliath’s work is affixed within the private space of the home. Goliath pulls it from its secret place and “addresses head-on the way in which the disruption of the political destroys bodies, mortality being her primary concern” (Bal 2010:14). In South Africa, domestic violence is a family secret, often negated or ignored by the police and the judiciary.

Goliath's work, using silence, creates art that stimulates reaction. In my problem statement I asked how art 'works' in a broader socio-political context. This exhibition comprises images that evoke, imply and signify rather than claiming to have answers. According to Bal (2010:14), once one understands how meaning is effected without being communicated, one has created a political space.

Personal Accounts is linked to *Berenice* by an inversive strategy: the presence of surrogates represent Berenice's absence, whereas in *Personal Accounts* the victims are present, but silenced, precisely the way that domestic abuse is concealed, as an intimate, private matter. Goliath's strategy of silence, as the women recall their traumatic memories, is an extremely effective way of invoking absence within presence. As a socio-political protest, the work shares an intimate view of pain, strength and defiance, demanding change through the power of their presence. The bodily presence of the individuals also recalls a tacit knowledge in their communication – profoundly disturbing as suppressed emotion,

The following work under discussion is the *Elegy: Eunice Ntombifuthi Dube* (2018) performance. Whereas *Personal Accounts* exposes the women's faces but suppresses their statements, the *Elegy* performances concern a woman stepping from the dark, sustaining a vocal note in an act of mourning, before another performer takes her place. Of particular significance is the commemoration entitled *Elegy: Eunice Nombifuthi Dube* (2018), a 23-year-old victim of intimate femicide.

3.5 ELEGY: EUNICE NOMBIFUTHI DUBE (2018)

Goliath's *Elegy* performances commenced in 2015, an ongoing project to remember the identities of victims, from history to the present, including Louisa van de Caab, a slave woman, murdered by her intimate partner in 1786.² The *Elegy* performances are political in that they trace the mortal violence perpetuated against women and gender non-conformists over centuries in South Africa.

The performance commemorates an LGBTIQ+ person or a woman who has been raped and murdered due to her gender, race or through sexual violence. The conceptual underpinning of the *Elegy* ritual is how, through the absence of an

² The performance dedicated to Louisa van de Caab (2019) was performed at the Iziko Slave Lodge in Cape Town: <https://www.gabriellegoliath.com/full-videolouisa-van-de-caab>

individual, a site becomes a place where communities can experience an empathic encounter and mourn (Gabrielle Goliath 2022).

The *Elegy* (2018) performance for Eunice Ntombifuthi Dube took place at The Centre for the Less Good Idea in Maboneng, Johannesburg on 18 August 2018. Dube was murdered by her partner on 20 September 2017, her mother's birthday. On the day in question, her mother answered her phone, expecting it to be a congratulatory call. Instead, the caller informed her that her 23-year-old daughter, Eunice Ntombifuthi was dead, beaten with a hammer and suffocated by her lover.

The recorded installation of *Elegy* comprises seven screens of approximately 190 cm in height, arranged in a semi-circle. Each screen shows a life-size female performer sustaining the B-note. The sound emanating from the seven screens ensures that the spectator experiences the performance as an immersive chorus (Jayawardane 2019).

Kimani (2018) was profoundly moved by an *Elegy* performance, a ritual of mourning enacted by seven opera singers. As the performance ended, a singer silently moved to a position behind the audience to create a circle. When the last singer joined the circle, the performers exited the venue. People could be heard sobbing in the silence, evidencing the impact of Goliath's work for those who have not been given a voice, plaguing us with the irresolution of GBV. Kimani (2018) said that the emotional impression remained with her for weeks afterwards.

In a socio-political context, Goliath acknowledges that mourning offers neither healing nor closure, but expresses an essential, enduring irresolution. Goliath states that she records each iteration "as a kind of archive of mourning" (Jayawardane 2019).



Fig 36. Gabrielle Goliath, *Elegy* 7-track recording (2019).

An *Elegy* performance offers an empathic place for communal mourning, irrespective of cultural or national affiliation. According to Goliath (Gabrielle Goliath 2022e), she works around “the kinds of symbolic violence through which traumatised black bodies are routinely objectified”. The *Elegy* performances open a distinctly decolonial and intersectional space, wherein mourning is presented as a social and productive work (Gabrielle Goliath 2022e).

Goliath discovered that from soprano to contralto, women opera singers can sustain a B-natural note. “The note becomes ... a location of sorts for a collective vocalised, ritualised labour,” she explains (Jayawardane 2019). Female vocalists emerge from the pitch dark and one by one, in single file, step up to a platform. Each performer sustains the B-natural note and steps down, followed by the next performer. The process is repeated for more than an hour.



Fig 37. Gabrielle Goliath, *Elegy: Eunice Ntombifuthi Dube* (2018).

Goliath uses this sung cry as a poignant ‘wall of sound’ that provokes reflection, memory, and mourning. I believe that the lament summons the absent presence, not only of the specific woman whose subjectivity is brought into presence, but of others who have been killed. The audience moves around the space, almost as participants in a ceremony. The performance reminds me of an ancient pagan ritual performed by women invoking their goddesses.



Fig 38. Gabrielle Goliath, *Elegy: Eunice Ntombifuthi Dube* (2018).

An analysis of Goliath's "choreography of voice and image", invites the audience to participate in an encounter with devastating artworks of continuous sonic impact that irrevocably change perceptions of abuse (Lauwrens 2020:1). The physical and emotional effort of the *Elegy* performers' continuous lament is expressed through the power of the collective voices. The enduring vocalised note, repeated by so many women, not only restores a specific subjectivity but functions as a powerful political act of sonic dissent.

Lauwrens (2020:2) opines that Goliath's conceptual aims rely on the emotional and affective responses from the audience. Goliath says

When language fails us, when conventional therapy fails us, art allows for a different kind of encounter, a more human encounter perhaps. One in which the differences that mark our experiences of the world become the grounds for our mutual acknowledgment and care (Lauwrens 2020:8).

Goliath believes that although art can inflict harm, conversely it can elevate through aesthetic, inter-relational encounters. She determines that *Elegy* enables a 'recovery' of the victim within the context of absence and loss, drawing the audience into a relational, affective, ethical and political encounter (Jayawardane 2019). An increasing body of scholarship identifies the visual arts as a locus of empathic and affective audience response. Just as the eyes are entranced by images, so the ears are affected by sound. Sound and hearing engender profound, transformative and critical self-awareness and perhaps more importantly, enable grief and collective mourning in this context (Lauwrens 2020:3-4).

Acts of memory can and should exceed a specific site. These operate within an interim space revealed by the unpredictable relationship between common memory and sense memory (Bennett 2005:98). The response to Goliath's live performances and recorded performances attest to the importance of the art and its affect which transcend place. Goliath entwines the ordinary space with exceptional trauma and obscene violence, binding them through a sonic lament, allowing them to unfold at a deeper level (Bennett 2005:98).

3.6 CONCLUDING REMARKS

Goliath's deft use of various methodologies is evidenced in the video *Personal Accounts* (2014). She inverts the strategy of absent presence whereby the victims of IPV's closely cropped faces appear on large screens. As a commentary on the complicit silence concerning IPV, of which so many are guilty, the women 'testify' to their experiences, but the words are expunged. In this way, Goliath brings traumatic memories to the foreground, reflecting the lived experiences of the victims. This strategy effectively functions as a mechanism of materialised absence in presence.

The first artworks discussed featured photographs and video. The third work, *Elegy* (2018), is a performance that is reminiscent of ancient Greek theatre or a feminine Pagan ritual. The audience moves freely in the space but is finally surrounded by the performers, drawn into the performance that engenders memories of other unnatural deaths. Undoubtedly, the *Elegy* performances and recordings promote expressions of tacit knowledge and act as agents for change.

In conclusion, when one comprehends that artworks can arouse, insinuate and signify, rather than just conveying an inflexible meaning, a political art space is generated (Bal 2010:14). Goliath's defiant works of mourning are undoubtedly political. She offers places where viewers are immersed in a ritual to become one with the work as agents of change and be part of the bodily enactment of tacit doing.

As mentioned in the first chapter, Damisch (Van Alphen 20054:194) contends that all cultural products function as intellectual or philosophical endeavours. He states that artworks are not passive cultural or historical manifestations or of the artist's intention. Damisch (Van Alphen 20054:194) posits that the artwork is an active reflection of the artist's thought process, something he refers to as 'pictorial intelligence'. Albeit that he speaks of 'transhistorical' questions, Damisch states that these must be answered within the confines of a specific historical context (Van Alphen 2005:194-5). Consequently, history is treated as an irrevocable reality; a history that only exists within the context of *something*. The durational sonic performances dedicated to victims of violence evidence Goliath's refusal to remain silent about the lives lost to gender-based and sexualised violence in the present history. The audience in turn becomes part of the affect as 'something' that is real and specific.

This section identified strategies of art making that facilitate collective mourning without reliance on replicas of violence. Therefore, my analyses and comparison of theoretical perspectives partially addressed the research problem outlined in chapter one, where I aimed at positioning Goliath's philosophical realism and the dilemma of depicting trauma as absent presence.

In chapter four, I discuss my work, theoretical influences, motivation, methodology and media, including Goliath's influence. The four works discussed are from the *#OverMyDeadBody* (2022) exhibition at the Durban Art Gallery.

CHAPTER 4 ANDREA WALTERS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This study examines the four components of my exhibition, *#OverMyDeadBody* (2022) at the Durban Art Gallery, relating each work to a specific research question. I articulate my reliance on material thinking and practice-led research, since these are imperative to my art making process. The background explains the circumstances that led to my focus on IPV and femicide, and briefly mentions two previous bodies of work. I explain Goliath's influence on my work and the media choices that underpin my art. I also point out similarities between our work. My work is analysed subjectively and supported by relevant theory. Since my artwork is politically motivated, I consider to what extent my work conforms with Damisch's notion of the theoretical art object.

4.2 BACKGROUND

Although I was in a relationship that seemed normal, I was subjected to IPV over several years and was eventually admitted to a psychiatric institution due to post-traumatic stress disorder. After I left the relationship, I began to study visual arts through Unisa. My lecturers identified that my work concealed my experiences of IPV and gently encouraged me to follow my instincts. This resulted in an exhibition entitled *Vrou Vertaal* (2012) which revealed how a woman is devastated by abuse. Situated in a black room with mirrored walls, nightclub lighting and a rotating mirror ball, embroidered umbrellas were suspended from various levels while text projections of justifications, apologies and threats, meandered over them.

Days after the death of Anene Booysen, gang raped and disembowelled by her ex-boyfriend and his friends, Reeva Steenkamp was shot by her partner. These events precipitated my exhibition, *Abject of Desire* (2013). The body of work explored the public adulation experienced by professional athletes, the accountability of the media and the athlete's corporate sponsors. Laser-cut stainless steel medallions alluded to medals, sponsors, guns and social media. SAPS Ballistics in Amanzimtoti introduced me to Kevlar, the material used to manufacture bullet-resistant vests. Steenkamp's last Instagram post, "I woke up in a happy safe home this morning. Not everyone did" was embroidered on 43 Kevlar squares, cocooned in defragmented Kevlar threads to make a quilt. A video performance accompanied the exhibition (<https://www.instagram.com/reevasteenkamp/?hl=en>)

4.3 #OVER MY DEAD BODY I

I address the first research question of how traumatic memory and tacit knowledge advance veneration and grief for the absent presence of victims through *#OverMyDeadBody I*. As a preamble to the exhibition, I discuss how material thinking and practice-led research direct my work, using the example of *#OverMyDeadBody I* (2022).

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. She cites Eagleton (2007:2) who claims:

The whole region of human perception and sensation, in contrast to the more rarefied domain of conceptual thought [...] that territory is nothing less than the whole of our sensate life together – the business of affections and aversions, of how the world strikes the body on its sensory surfaces.

Orozco (2017:352) contends that memorial items created from everyday objects can inflate protest action., although object ontology is neglected in political theory over the human body. Orozco argues for the significance of banal, everyday objects that can perform an impactful role in protest action (2017:353).



Fig 39. Andrea Walters, *#OverMyDeadBody I* installation view (2022).

González (1995:133) notes that, over time, objects become imprinted with human scent, sags and shapes. These become integrated with the *psychic body* as prosthesis of the mind or autotopographies. Bal (2002) concurs that autotopographies are created from personal items. Curiously, I mostly respond to ordinary household objects.

Since femicide transcends socio-economic and racial groups, I sought a medium that could adequately represent most South African women. These tentative thoughts supported the practice-led experiments for *#OverMyDeadBody I*. This notion led me to doing five-minute drawings of my own mouth for a few weeks, while I experimented with various domestic items. In the laundry I really observed a bar of green Sunlight soap and became excited. Its smell, its ubiquity – I just knew it would work. Sunlight soap is used in several applications in most homes. I decided to carve the victims' mouths in green Sunlight soap bars which has an instantly recognisable smell.

I went online to find an image of Tshegofatso Pule, a pregnant woman recently shot and hanged on the orders of her lover. Using children's carving tools and a toothbrush, I carved 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. The mouth became the most accurate, personal form of identification.

I conducted research online and in the daily newspapers concerning femicides. 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 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 legal recourse. 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 40. Andrea Walters, *Tshepo Rakoma* (2022).



Fig 41. Andrea Walters, *Diane Chandler* (2022).



Fig 42. Andrea Walters, *Tsholofelo Mofokeng* (2022).



Fig 43. Andrea Walters, *Chanell Henning* (2022).



Fig 44. Andrea Walters, *Reeva Steenkamp* (2022).



Fig 45. Andrea Walters, *Tshegofatso Phule* (2022).



Fig 46. Andrea Walters, *Vicky Ntozini* (2022).



Fig 47. Andrea Walters, *Janet Scott* (2022).



Fig 48. Andrea Walters, *Mbalenhle Cele* (2022).



Fig 49. Andrea Walters, *The Unknown Woman* (2022).

The process of daily life and its activities are embodied in artworks through an experiential flow. This tacit knowledge flows to closure through the modifications to our habitat and the things within it, determining that action, feeling and meaning are one (Dewey in Barrett 2007:116).

Bennett (2005:3-4) cautions against redemptive art promoting a philosophical realism which determines that art can apprehend and advance authentic experience. If art is bound to a generic classification, it hinders the unique ways in which art discloses original ways of conceptualising how art exposes and signifies trauma. Bennett (2005:11) focuses on the conjunction of cognition, affect and its autonomic responses.

As pertains to how traumatic memory and tacit knowledge advance veneration and grief in the context of absent presence, Bennett (2005:24-5) charges that conventional expressions of artworks as reflecting a prior state are futile. Imagery associated with traumatic memory is not confined to the past event but with the experience of memory in the present. A theory of affect is the only way to align the production and reception of the memory.



Fig 50. Andrea Walters, *#OverMyDeadBody I* installation view (2022).

Goliath's *Berenice* (2010) images loom large in the gallery as silenced monochromatic symbols for the years denied to her. In the same way, the sculpted mouths of *#OverMyDeadBody I* (2022) serve as silent symbols for the flesh-and-blood women whose lives have been expunged. Both the *Berenice* (2010) photographic portraits and the small *#OverMyDeadBody I* (2022) sculptures mounted on Perspex shelves are counter-memorials in a political sense, functioning as reminders of an inconvenient history, an injustice perpetrated against a certain group. These are usually impermanent unlike the bronze and marble of official memorials.

Citing Delbo, Bennett (2005:25) proposes that the sense memory stores the imprint of the traumatic event and as such, it is always located in the present. These perspectives are aligned with my prior experience and the memory that impacts my work.

Although conventional monuments function as permanent memorials honouring the dead, they become sites of forgetting. According to Huyssen, "There is nothing more invisible than a monument" (in Bal 2010:24). My small counter-monuments require the viewer's proximity and considerable time to look and smell the soap. Bal (2010:24) cites Michalsk who says "the principal aim of a counter-monument is to register protest or disagreement ... and to set a process of reflection in motion" 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.

Although I have made the soap sculptures as accurately as possible, this is not sentimental or exploitative: it is intended to make these victims 'real', transcending just another media report. My view is supported by Barbara Bolt, who questions why representation is problematised by artists and philosophers, since representations are understood as copies of the real. In the visual arts, representation, realism and figuration are aligned in opposition to abstraction and non-representative art. Bolt (2004:12) posits that figuration exceeds a factual reading since its concern is a specific way of contemplating the word. My work is deliberately figurative and names the subjects, however I agree that silence can be a potent force in political art (Bal 2010:28). In the present, the silence of each representation communicates her perpetual absence within this presence (Bal 2010:38).

4.4 #OverMyDeadBody II (2022)

#OverMyDeadBody II responds to two research questions. It outlines how I articulate the residual memory and absent presence of femicide victims and it refers to how traumatic memory in the present can become a mechanism of materialised absence.

#OverMyDeadBody II is a video projection that was suspended above a worn rug in the gallery. The video, a close-cropped view of my mouth, is an inversion of Goliath's *Personal Accounts* (2014). The video had to be re-filmed several times because I became emotional. The experiences of the victims are not mine, but they are deeply affective.



Fig 51. Andrea Walters, *#OverMyDeadBody II* installation view (2022).



Fig 52. Andrea Walters, *#OverMyDeadBody II* installation video (2022).
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jUsxLHR7iCs>

#OverMyDeadBody II addresses the juncture between art and trauma, a realist aesthetics that encourages relational communication (Bennett 2005:7). Narrative film relies on characterisations, whereby 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). Deleuze uses the term ‘encountered sign’ to express what is felt rather than directed by intellect or recognition. He finds that emotion sparks critical inquiry and profound contemplation (Bennett 2005:7). This video exceeds the link between maker and the artwork because it plays back at a society that makes femicide possible. As a political artwork, *#OverMyDeadBody II* incited a diverse response. Ironically, the ‘real’ relationship is between the individual who takes the time to engage with the work for 15 minutes. 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 left soaps and carving tools on the rug beneath the monitor. The viewer response was such that I had to bring more soaps every few days. The soaps have been collected as evidence of the relationship between viewers and *#OverMyDeadBody II*. It reveals how I articulate the residual memory and absent presence of the victims and how articulations of traumatic memories function as mechanisms of materialised absence.



Fig 53. Andrea Walters, *#OverMyDeadBody III* installation view (2022).

4.5 *#OverMyDeadBody III* (2022)

#OverMyDeadBody III exemplifies the roles of practical methodologies in art concerning GBV and femicide. Personally, this is a distressing work because it was inspired by personal experience. The rusted skeleton of a double-bed hovers in mid-air, 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.



Fig 54. Andrea Walters, *#OverMyDeadBody III* installation view (2022).



Fig 55. Andrea Walters, *#OverMyDeadBody III* installation view (2022).

When it was installed in the gallery, I instinctively gathered the soap residue and rust shavings on the sheet. I moved the residue to the right side, creating the ephemeral form of a woman on what was 'my' side of the marital bed. According to Linde (2017:2), this offers a phenomenological encounter by means of its construction and conceptual function. The suspended bed cannot be slept in. It serves as a monument to traumatic memory associated with a place that functions as both absence and presence (Linde 2017:2). In my view, the title is both metonym and metaphor.

According to Ettinger (2021:306), a matrixial borderspace is encapsulated in/ by the artwork, enabling a psychic overlap between 'encounter-Thing' and 'event-Thing', creating new configurations of matrixial links through others. Importantly, she observes that art can transform the amnesia of solitary traumatic events into a memory that will only emerge through sharing with 'an-other', an autonomy within a mutualism. Only when this occurs through shared suffering and 'com-passion', can the memory be observed. I was surprised by the emotional response of viewers to *#OverMyDeadBody III*, a response aligned with Ettinger's view. Ettinger (2021:306) states that an artwork can elicit various emotions, including suffering, compassion, mercy, comfort, apprehension and frailty.



Fig 56. Andrea Walters, *#OverMyDeadBody III* installation view (2022).

Art that is permeated by the matrixial gaze exposes both the artist and viewer, initiating the need for a subjective object that is inexplicably embodied as a gaze within the work (Ettinger 2021:306). The gaze beckons the viewer to a space simultaneously within and beyond what is visible. The viewer is called upon to abandon her/his defences, to be willing to share and absorb fragments of trauma – enabling one’s own matrixial threads to be intertwined within the work, and in turn, allowing the work to infiltrate her/his individual “psychic space of severality” (Ettinger 2021:306).

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, shedding rust and soap detritus while the ephemeral image of the woman attests to her absence.

According to Bennett (2005:53-4), a communication must transpire between the artist, who encounters the trauma of others, and the viewer as spectator, who affectively responds to the visual imagery. This enables the artist to enact the state of grief as an embodied perception.



Fig 57. Andrea Walters, *#OverMyDeadBody IV* installation view (2022).

Fig 59. Andrea Walters, *#OverMyDeadBody IV Thula* lament soundtrack (2022). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eRrAF-XzqD4&t=2s>

Bennett (2005:49-50) rejects the idea that trauma is a nebulous event affecting a single person, saying it has a tangible effect on the world. A traumatic loss cannot be transferred from its primary mourners but, through art, it becomes transactional. Citing Das, Bennett (2005:50) uses the “antiphony” of mourning to describe the transference and politics of art relating to grief.

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 enactment of the sense memory – 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).

4.7 CONCLUSIONARY REMARKS

The artist is stimulated through an affective encounter. Sensation is what is being created by the artist, irrespective of the medium: the art object is less important than the experience it sustains, forcing viewers to think critically instead of conventionally. Sensation triggers profound thought because the viewer is forced to engage, however involuntarily. Affects are embodied judgements that occur when individuals make positive or negative evaluations.

CHAPTER 5

5.1 CORE DISCUSSIONS

Chapter one established that GBV and femicide in South Africa are amongst the highest in the world. Although it transcends socio-economic groups, black women who are poor and unemployed are most at risk. GBV and IPV are rampant in South Africa, and yet few artists work with the topic or write about it.

Relying on the keywords underpinning the study, I will briefly outline my findings. In terms of absent presence, it is places not people that facilitate mourning since the works do not rely on the identificatory subject when they travel elsewhere. For example, *Elegy* can be severed from its original site but is still able to engender communal grief, irrespective of culture or nationality. Traumatic memory facilitates affect which oscillates between the maker and the spectator. Affect “conveys the subjective processes that exceed our ability to repress them, certain of their features might be understood as ... traumatic memory” (Bennett 2005:23). Because creative arts are inspired by personal concerns, memory activates tacit knowledge. According to Miller (2015:20) tacit knowledge cannot be clearly defined because artists ‘lose’ themselves in work and manipulate materials intuitively. Naming is a potent tool in terms of the activist nature of our art. In terms of mourning and grievability, the pain of another seeks a home not only in language but also in the body. According to Damisch, theoretical art objects facilitate a compelling thought process, creating the site of collaboration and dialogue it stimulates and facilitates. These objects are political because they empower viewers. Damisch rejects the idea of artworks as passive reflections of an era. He states that artwork is a reflection, not a mirror, but a dynamic act of thought (van Alphen 2005:194).

The study involves an investigation of Goliath’s work and mine, since we use very different media to approach the same topic. Goliath’s media include photography, audio-visual works, sound and live performances as invocation that are archived as multi-track recordings. I carve, create found installations and rely on household objects, oftentimes using embroidered text in my handwriting as a way of inserting myself into the work, acknowledging tacit knowledge. *#OverMyDeadBody* (2022), was significantly influenced by Goliath, since I used two media inspired by her work, namely a video performance and a recorded lament.

Goliath and I share a common traumatic background. This is embodied in the sense-feeling manifested through the physical process of making art. Our method is confirmed by the proponent of practice-led art, Barrett (2007:10). She determines that knowledge is always subjective, significantly positioned and experiential. The empathic 'knowing' we experience as artists, guides us and enables us to tell truths that are not reliant on 'being' there.

Importantly, Goliath and I avoid inflicting any further violence on the victims or their loved ones. We transmit real experience in a broader socio-political context, as aligned with Damisch's notion of the theoretical object. Goliath and I are committed to creating work that communicates trauma but eschews testimony and speaks for itself. This is aligned with Ettinger's notion of wit(h)nessing a crime, whereby one is both with and remembers for that person, a type of art that transcends the personal to become social. As Bennet states, the antiphony (call and response) of mourning makes art transactional. According to Bal (2010:251), this type of art transcends the personal to become social. She further proposes that protest and grievance invoke history through traces. These traces affect theoretical art objects that demand reflection on death, erasure and grief, since the work must provoke, entice and compel thought in order to be a theoretical art object.

Goliath and I name the victims who are the subjects of our work. Every work by Goliath uses the first name of a victim and in the *Elegy* performances, the full name of the victim is included. I, in turn, carve the victims' names and ages at death in the reverse of the soap bars as a strategy of remembrance. Through these little counter-memorials, I give them some sort of subjectivity and the opportunity to be remembered. Sunlight soap, mostly aligned with the domestic realm of women's work, with use, dissolves and finally disappears. I am determined that these women will be remembered. Goliath's ongoing *Berenice* (2010) and *Berenice* (2022) photographic portraits act as silent surrogates for the absent child and the years denied to her. My *#OverMyDeadBody 1* (2022) carved mouths are also silent. I believe that they are given voice by the representative carvings that, in a sense, reveal their personalities.

Goliath's *Personal Accounts* (2014) silent videos of women's faces where they 'speak' of IPV and rape are deeply distressing. My second work, *#OverMyDeadBody II* (2022), employs a similar but different strategy. The video is tightly cropped to show only my mouth, but I say these victims' names, their ages and how they died.

#OverMyDeadBody III (2022), does not directly align with Goliath's work, excepting perhaps to reinforce the horror of continued IPV where death is the solution: either naturally through age or through the continued physical violence. For me, this work is very upsetting because it reminds me of the violence I experienced.

#OverMyDeadBody IV (2022) shows the extreme on the continuum of IPV when a woman dies. Once again, inspired by Goliath, I asked Mariechan Luiters to sing a lament, which is included in the work. Just so, Goliath's work shows the end, offering a place of continued mourning for a woman killed, employing a lament to engender collective mourning. *Elegy: Eunice Ntombifuthi Dube* (2018) is a performance from another ongoing project by Goliath, memorialising and mourning named women. Within these intimate spaces where the audience and women opera singers mingle is highly evocative. Since the performances are recorded, they not only inspire *in situ* collective mourning but collective mourning wherever they are played.

Bennett (2005:49-50) rejects the idea that trauma is a nebulous event affecting a single person, saying it has a tangible effect on the world. A traumatic loss cannot be transferred from its primary mourners but, through art, it becomes transactional. Citing Das, Bennett(2005:50) uses the "antiphony" of mourning to describe the transference and politics of art relating to grief. Both Goliath and I have had viewers come to share their experiences at the exhibitions. It is this kind of work that facilitates the hard conversations about rape, GBV, IPV and femicide which confirms that the works 'work' independently in a socio-political manner.



Fig 60. Andrea Walters, *#OverMyDeadBody* (2022).
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vci63do0i0I&t=5s>

5.2 NEW INSIGHTS

Art is assuredly able to advance veneration and grief for the unknown other without relying on literal representations of traumatic experience. Through an engagement with Goliath's work and the experiences I had at my recent exhibition, it is a fallacy that art cannot effect change. Although Goliath states that she has no lofty ideas about what art can achieve, both bodies of work have revealed that diverse groups of viewers were affected by the exhibitions. I believe that is the beginning of political change.

5.3 LIMITATIONS

The study was confined to selected works by two South African female artists. Although research has revealed that not many women artists work with this topic, the inclusion of other female artists could prove fruitful.

5.4 POTENTIAL RESEARCH

I am interested in a practice-led participatory project working with women who have been incarcerated for killing their abusers.

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