Rhodes University

Title

Exhibition: *The Remnants of Space*

Mini- Thesis: SAFE SPACE? A Visual Dialogue through the Art of Trace-Making and Story-telling

By

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement for Master of Fine Art at Rhodes University Department of Fine Art

Under the supervision of

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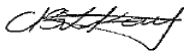
DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I declare that this thesis is my own work and that all the sources I have used have been acknowledged in complete bibliographic references. This thesis is being submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement for Master of Fine Art at Rhodes University. I declare that it has not been submitted before any other degree or examination at another university.

Signed  Date 19 September 2025

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Name of Candidate:

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Degree:

- Master In Fine Art

Title of research:

- Exhibition: The Remnants of Space
- Mini- Thesis: SAFE SPACE? A Visual Dialogue through the Art of Trace-Making and Story-telling

DECLARATION

I declare that my research did not require ethical clearance because (tick all that apply):

I did not collect data from human participants or animal subjects	N/A
I used previously collected data that had already received ethics clearance.	N/A
I analysed documents / open-access digital texts that are freely available in the public domain.	YES
I did a literature review/analysis of theoretical or secondary material only.	N/A
I used human datasets of non-sensitive information that are either anonymous (identifiers were never collected) or have been deidentified (identifiers have been completely removed).	N/A
I used commercially produced human biological material (e.g. established human cell lines).	N/A
I observed people in public spaces and natural environments where they had no reasonable expectation of privacy and I did not interact with them or intervene in any way.	N/A
I used non-living animal materials (eg bones of already deceased organisms or fossils) while complying with any custody and/or jurisdiction requirements.	N/A
I did a content analysis of public media (newspapers, advertisements, and social media posts).	N/A

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I did a simulation study with no real-world consequences and does not involve disturbing or distressing content.	N/A
I observed flora, fauna, and ecosystems without interfering with or disturbing their natural state while complying with any jurisdiction requirements.	N/A
Other (Please provide details): I interviewed artists who have exhibited their work on a public domain.	Yes
I have incorporated screen-shots of text-messages from sender to receiver, however I have kept their identities concealed.	Yes

Signature of Candidate:

Date: 19 September 2025

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Date: 19 September 2025

ABSTRACT

This mini-thesis explores the relationship between ‘safe space,’ female fear, and the potential for violence through a practice-led investigation centered on visual trace-making and storytelling. Working primarily with porcelain as a main material metaphor, my practice transforms overlooked architectural elements, specifically floor tiles and brick pavers, into delicate, breakable porcelain artworks. My intentional use of porcelain emphasises the tension between structural durability and symbolic fragility. The written component supports my practical exploration, drawing upon the work of Pumla Dineo Gqola ‘s *Female Fear Factory* (2021), to unpack the mechanisms that sustain female fear within a context of gender-based violence in South Africa; also referencing Tim Cresswell’s, *Place: a short introduction* (2004), to unpack the fundamental components of human geography, and highlight familiar everyday uses of the term ‘place’ in relation to the term space. Finally, by integrating the literature of Ralph Rugoff’s *Scene Of The Crime* (1997), I explore forensic aesthetics and observe how violence leaves both visible and invisible traces behind; as a sculpture student, I extend this inquiry by deliberately materialising traces through mould-making and slip casting, thereby giving tangible form to the concept of presence and absence. Through engagement, both my mini-thesis and practice-led research facilitates a dialogue around gendered violence, reflecting how any space holds the potential for violence, be it public or private.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to my family, especially my parents and grandparents, whose unwavering support has been a pillar of strength throughout my university journey. I am grateful to my supervisor, Associate Professor. Maureen De Jager, for her valuable guidance and encouragement throughout my Master's in Fine Art Practice Degree. I sincerely extend my thanks to my co-supervisor, Professor Ruth Simbao, for her continuous support and reassuring presence, as well as for granting me the opportunity to be part of the National Research Foundation (NRF) and Arts of Africa Global South Research Centre. I would like to thank South African artists, Kathryn Smith and Penny Siopis for taking the time out of their busy schedule to assist and inform me about their practice and body of work.

A big and sincere thanks to my classmates for their support and words of encouragement throughout my journey at Rhodes University. I would like to acknowledge the Rhodes Fine Art Department, with special thanks to Jan Nel for his ongoing support and technical assistance over the last six years and to Heidi Smith for her unwavering encouragement.

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LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

INTRODUCTION

In this mini-thesis, I explore the relationship between female fear, space, and the potential violence through a practice-led investigation grounded in trace-making and storytelling. My studio-practice inspired from an intimate engagement with my grandparents' home; for the purpose of this research, I refer to it as "Ma and Pa's" home. I use this terminology in a deliberate manner to convey the personal significance of this space, which became a conceptual and material anchor in the early stages of my practice-led research. In particular, I direct my attention to my Ma's kitchen tiles, a surface that has always intrigued me and has prompted reflection on how "safe spaces" for women are constructed, perceived, and disrupted. As a South African woman, my research was taken from the perspective of fearing the potential of violence, particularly in a country where femicide and gender-based violence (GBV) is pervasive. This led me to question whether any space I enter is considered safe or if fear inevitably overshadows it. This inherent dynamic between female fear and vulnerability forms the foundation of both the theoretical framing and the practical explorations of my research.

My mini-thesis is inclusive of three chapters. The first chapter, 'Fear and space', examines female fear, particularly women's experiences within public and private environments. I draw upon Pumla Dineo Gqola's concept of the *Female Fear Factory* (2021) and how it is a mechanism of control, serving as a reminder to women that nothing, not even our bodies, are truly ours. I highlight that the cultivation of fear drives women to police themselves from potential danger. In addition to female fear in relation to space, I turn to Tim Creswell (2004:24) definition on place and interrogate what defines the difference between place and space, by connecting his observation to the relationship between the concept of a 'safe space', and the notion of 'home' as a traditional space of protection. This inquiry surfaces as a contradiction: during the national Covid-19 pandemic, violence persisted in domestic settings. I reflect on this disquiet through Penny Siopis six-minute video piece titled *Shadow Shame Again* (2021), in which violence lingers as an haunting presence.

Chapter Two, 'Materiality and text', transitions to my art-making process, divided into two section. In this chapter I observe how materiality and text both function as carriers of

communication and meaning. In the sub-section 'Materiality', I focus on porcelain as a symbol of vulnerability and fragility, aligning it with the context of gender-based violence (GBV). I explore my fascination with cracks, and marks found on the surface of floors, and have explored this thematic within my own art-making process. In relation to this self-examination I analyse Igshaan Adams's material choices, and his exploration of floor surfaces as a bodily presence. In my sub-section, 'Text', I unpack the concept of contemporary art and the role of interpretation in relation to the use of text within my body of work. This includes an analysis of artists Sue Williamson and Gabrielle Goliath, whose practices both engage with text and conceptual storytelling.

The Final Chapter, 'Traces and covert violence', is focused solely on trace-making, referencing Ralph Rugoff's book *Scene of The Crime* (1997). In this chapter I explore invisible and visible traces within my body of work; analysing the way I define a trace, placing focus on the act of uncovering and revealing. It is about exploring the relationship between absence and presence. I analyse the work of South African forensic artist, Kathryn Smith and how she employs forensic aesthetics to foreground the physical and material remnants of violence. Smith's clever use of the trace is vividly shown through her application of ultra-violent lighting, shifting the invisible into visibility.

In essence, my mini-thesis explores the materialisation of fear and embodied presence, focusing on overlooked surfaces: such as tiles, carpets and brick pavers which carry traces of bodily presence through movement. In so doing, my focus is to expose invisible marks and *silent* stories sealed within the grouting of these surfaces. [1]

0.1 Literature review and conceptual framing

This research draws on feminist, spatial, and material discourses to examine how gendered violence shapes women's experiences of space and safety. Pumla Dineo Gqola's *Female Fear Factory* (2021) frames fear as a patriarchal tool, conditioning women to navigate spaces with

[1] The layout and placement of the body of work that this mini-thesis relates to is represented in the appendix of this document.

hypervigilance. Avery Gordon's *Ghostly Matters* (1997) positions violence as a haunting presence, lingering in memory and material traces. Tim Cresswell's (2004) distinction between *space* and *place* highlights how spaces gain meaning through embodied experience, while Ruth Salvaggio's *Space and Woman* (1998) underscores how vulnerability and memory shape women's spatial perception.

Curator Ralph Rugoff's *Scene of the Crime* (1997) informs my exhibition design, where mundane architectural forms are transformed into fragile porcelain objects to evoke tension and reflection. Contemporary South African artists such as Penny Siopis, Igshaan Adams, Sue Williamson, Gabrielle Goliath, and Kathryn Smith inspire material and conceptual strategies that address violence, memory, and resistance. Together, these references underpin a practice that reflects on the emotional and physical precarity of women's safety.

Therefore, grounded in my positionality as a twenty-five-year old South African woman of colour living within a post-apartheid context marked by female fear and a surge in gender-based violence. My understanding of fear, space, and vulnerability is shaped by intergenerational storytelling, informal warnings, and habitual acts of vigilance. These understandings are neither abstract nor purely theoretical; rather, they are produced through navigating both public and private environments where my safety is questioned and never assured.

Fear, in this context, acts not as an internal emotional response but a mediated lens through which the world is experienced, informing my spatial awareness and vulnerability. Questions of the why's, how's and what's—take precedence, guiding both the practice-led approach and theoretical framing of this research. These cautionary practices, often framed as mechanisms of protection, have influenced how I perceive, inhabit and move through any space. Be it familiar or unfamiliar.

By foregrounding my age, gender and geographic location, I draw attention to how these factors inform my opinion on fear as a pervasive yet often invisible presence. Outlining how fear is not only experienced individually, but collectively. For that reason, I do not position myself as an objective observer; rather, I take on the dual role of researcher and subject, navigating the same spaces of precarity that this research seeks to interrogate.

0.2 Methodology

This mini-thesis employs a practice-led methodology that integrates studio-based practice, material experimentation and theoretical inquiry. Instead of positioning practice and theory as separated components, this research highlights art-making as a method of inquiry. This is done by prioritising process, material engagement, and embodied making as forms of thinking. Meaning arises through making, allowing material decisions to respond to theoretical concerns through a cyclical process of experimentation and investigation. Under this framework, mould-making and textile integration function both as technical methods and forensic tools, capturing material evidence.

In dialogue with the practice-led research, a forensic lens informs the research, by engaging with concepts of presence, absence, and latent histories. Architectural surfaces such as floors are approached as sites that bear witness, and forensic methods maintain a contextual relationship between both trace and space. Through mould-making, textile integration, and the recording of material residues such as abrasion, dirt, dust and floor surfaces, a mechanism is created that allows meaning to emerge from partial remains and impressions.

Porcelain serves as a central medium in this research, encapsulating paradoxical qualities: fragility, delicacy, and smoothness yet, unpredictable under extreme heat and manipulation. Through shaping, glazing and firing at various temperatures, I explored the material's limits, foregrounding trial and error, opposed to aiming for perfection. Faulty rolling, trapped air, over-glazing resulted in air pockets, surface ruptures, while over-firing led to vitrification, warping, blistering and sharp, glass-like edges resembling shards. Variations in firing temperature led to shifts in colour clarity, resulting in some tones appearing vibrant while others more subdued. Rather than discarding these outcomes, I integrated the irregularities within my practice. The broken fragments retained visible traces of the material's former state, revealing how heat and handling alter and affects porcelain as a medium.

In turn, the studio-based practice functions as a site of investigation, where repetition informs material making-decisions and guides conceptual development. Techniques such as mould-making, slip-casting and textile impressions display transformation and replication of familiar surfaces into delicate porcelain forms. By foregrounding my interpretation of "tracing," these techniques and processes helped me capture surface traces and material remnants as metaphors

for presence, absence, and the quiet narratives embedded within space. These traces carry a spectral quality, preserving the faint traces of what once occurred in a particular space.

While the studio processes are discussed in detail on pages 85-93, a brief overview situates them here as methodological tools. Mould-making and casting function as investigative tools through which concepts are materially explored. These techniques lift and preserve surface traces from architectural forms, translating industrial materials into fragile porcelain objects. Repetition and material transformation present subtle variations and distortions, highlighting process itself as a site of knowledge production. Textile integration extend this methodology by embedding intimacy, abrasion, and absence within the ceramic surface.

Site-specific engagement was integral to my practice. I drew inspiration from sites of personal importance, for example: My Ma and Pa's home, my own art studio and a frequently visited coffee shop. These sites became points of departure, exploring how fear subtly seeps even into familiar environments, imprinting traces that inform experience and memory. By engaging with these sites, I observed how day-to-day interactions leave traces, while the presence of others leave residual marks that serve as both conceptual and material prompts for my practice led research, informing embodied experiences within said spaces.

In addition, text and storytelling became an integral aspect of methodology in my practice. I incorporated tiles that I found with the inscription "Made in South Africa" underneath it, which I made a mould of and replicated it using porcelain, allowing the material itself to carry layered meaning and act as a site for reflection. Alongside this, I collected several WhatsApp 'check-in' text-messages, saved from interactions with female friends and family. These WhatsApp text-messages include phrases such as "Let me know when you get home" or "Are you safe?", reflecting a pervasive culture in which women are socialised to anticipate danger and always look out for one another. By incorporating these WhatsApp text-message into my research, I foreground how simple modes of communication becomes a mechanism for negotiating safety, revealing both the subtle omnipresence of fear and the extent to which women go to protect one another.

Complementing this research, the theoretical component draws on feminist and spatial discourses, including Gqola's (2021) concept of the "female fear factory" and Gordon's (1997) notion of haunting, to interrogate how gendered violence shapes women's experiences of space. Cresswell's (2004) space/place distinction and Salvaggio's insights into vulnerability and memory provide a framework for understanding embodied spatial perception, while Rugoff's (1997) forensic curatorial strategies inform an approach to materiality and absence. These perspectives are contextualised within the practices of South African artists, Penny Siopis, Gabrielle Goliath, Igshaan Adams, Sue Williamson, and Kathryn Smith, whose works in the context of their respective practices delve into storytelling, violence, text inscription and forensic aesthetics.

Together, site-specific engagement, material inscriptions and textual interventions situate this practice-led research within a gendered context, integrating the everyday, the relational, and the embodied. Therefore, by transforming mundane objects and interactions into repositories of presence, this research explores how trace-making carries the weight of past experiences, and preserves both embodied narratives and material traces within a particular space.

0.2.1 Visual Methodological Evidence

To illustrate the methodological evidence within this practice-led research. Photograph documentation of mould-making, slip-casting, loading of the kiln, and textile intervention capture moments of studio experimentation, material decision-making, and forensic processes. These photographs do not solely depict final outcomes of my practice, but demonstrate the studio as a space of ongoing experimentation, curiosity and inquiry. Where ideas are tested, played with, refined and adapted in dialogue with materials. By capturing this process in the form of visual documentation (Figures 1-12), the studio becomes an active site of research, serving as a point of visible interventions that inform both the conceptual and material development of my practice-led research, while simultaneously functioning as a means of visual record and reflection.

Figure 1: Floor surface cracks and wear serving as source material.

Figure 2: Bisque-fired porcelain floor surface trace.

Figure 3: Body-double silicon mould used to translate an existing concrete paving brick into porcelain.

Figure 4: Body-double silicon brick-paver in relation to original concrete paving brick.

Figure 5: Wet slip-cast porcelain brick pavers prior to bisque and glaze-firing.

Figure 6: Porcelain brick-pavers stacked in kiln prior to glaze firing.

Figure 7: Wooden box inserted with a "Made in South Africa" tile, capturing the industrial text and surface structure prior to slip-casting.

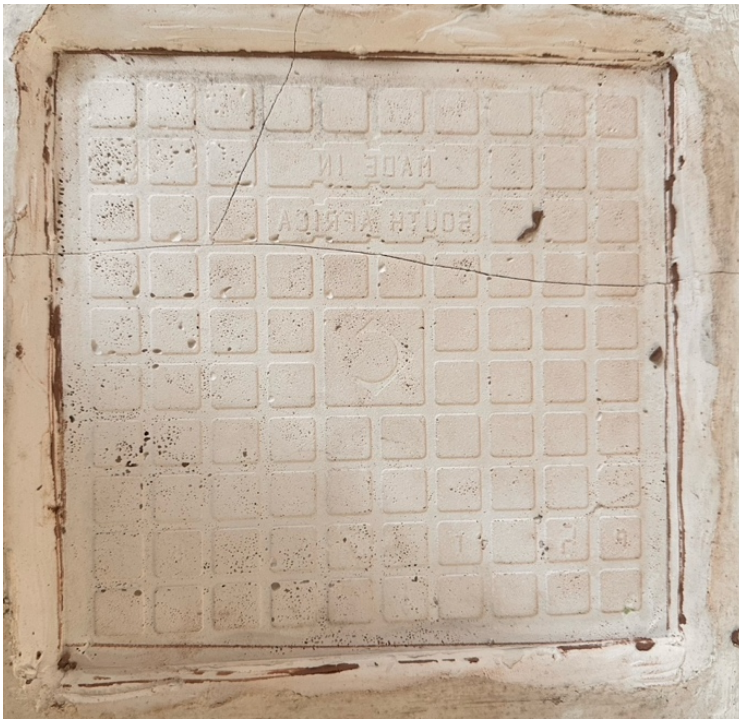

Figure 8: Plaster of Paris mould capturing industrial text and surface prior to slip-casting.

Figure 9: Bisque-fired porcelain slip-casted 'Made in South Africa' tile prior to glaze firing.

Figure 10: Wet sculpted porcelain rug impression prior to firing, produced through lace undergarment textile intervention.

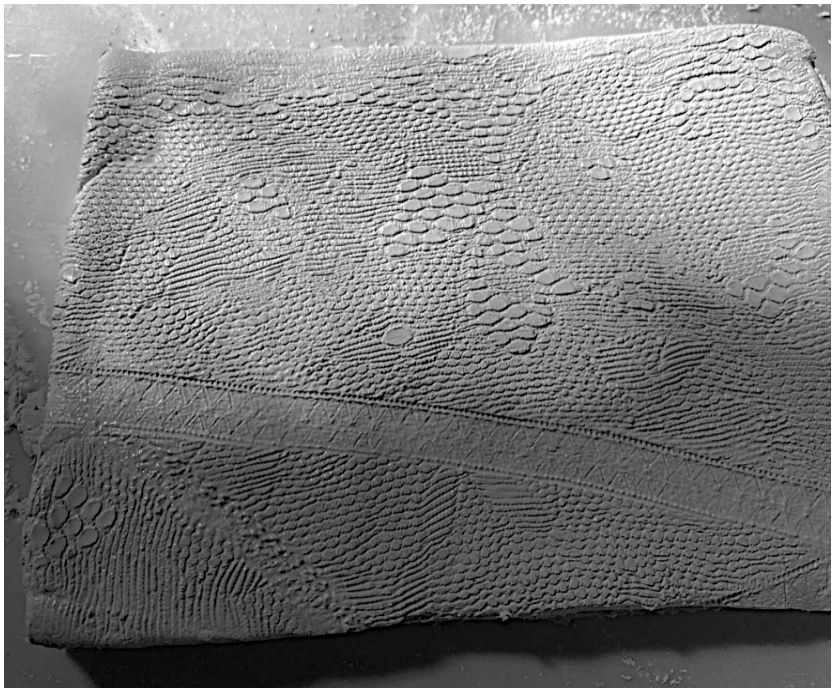

Figure 11: Wet sculpted porcelain tile impression prior to firing, produced through lace undergarment textile intervention.

Figure 12: Bisque-fired porcelain tiles bearing traces of abrasion and residue.

CHAPTER 1: FEAR AND SPACE

A stroll in the grocery store
The commotion of unfamiliar faces encircling one another
Tap the card, head to the exit
Lock the car door

Crisp morning air
Chirping birds
Neighbours glare
Unsettling presence

Cosy warm bed
Teacup resting on a coaster with warmth
Dim kitchen light
A towering silhouette visible through the glass pane

- Caryn Le Kay

1.1 "Female fear factory"

> *Female Fear Factory threatens women, mostly to remind us that nothing belongs to us- not even our bodies, neither in private nor public spaces.*
>
> Pumla Dineo Gqola (Gqola 2021:19)

Grounded in the broad tradition of feminist research, which "problematises gender and brings women and their concerns to the centre of attention" (DeVault, 2007:174) this project foregrounds the pervasive nature of fear, a theme explored in my practice and supported by the writings of Pumla Dineo Gqola (2021), Carrie L. Yodanis (2004) and Ndumiso Daluxolo Ngidi (2022) by which parallels are drawn between the factory, body autonomy and ultimately reminding us that "Female Fear Factory is everywhere, often invisible" (Gqola, 2021:44). The sub-section titled "Female Fear Factory" originates from award-winning South African author, feminist and academic Pumla Dineo Gqola's book titled *Female Fear Factory,* published in the year 2021, which explores the dynamics of female fear. Produced first as a chapter in her book titled *Rape: A South African Nightmare*[2] published in the year 2019, the chapter has since developed into a book.

Gqola (2021:65) delves into the complexity of living in a patriarchal culture as a woman, coining the term 'fear factory' as a metaphor to argue her point that women come to accept fear as a regular part of their lives; a condition manufactured by what they are told and how they are expected to behave. Gqola (2021:19) explains her phrase "Female Fear Factory" as a metaphor that speaks to the weaponisation of fear as a control mechanism that serves to reminder women that nothing is truly theirs, not even their bodies, whether they find themselves in private or public spaces.

[2] In the book review titled *A call to action*, reviewing Pumla Dineo Gqola's book Rape: a South African Nightmare, Tamaryn Jane Nicholson (2016:121) states: Pumla Dineo Gqola's book is a thoughtful interrogation of how the language and practices of past and contemporary South Africa produce a context in which gender violence is not only possible but routinely excused. She introduces her work by reflecting on her recollections of two televised interviews with rapists, providing a chilling account of how these men speak of rape without remorse, as a sexual act to which they are entitled (Gqola 2021:2). Gqola (2021:2) goes on to point out that these men do not incur true social costs as a result of their actions. They may have gone to prison, but their relationships with others remain and their actions as rapists do not leave them excluded from their communities or shamed (Gqola 2021:1). She makes an appeal to South Africans to view rape as a societal horror, made possible by patriarchy and perpetuated by a willingness to turn a blind eye towards violence enacted against all forms of the feminine (Gqola 2021:19).

According to Gqola (2021:37), “The Female Fear Factory works like a real factory in its logic and relationship to publicness. Like a factory that produces physical products, it takes up space” (Gqola 2021:37). In this analogy, female fear is presented as the product of a production process that shapes basic decisions and is rooted in patriarchal control (Gqola 2021:21). Familiar instincts, strategies and/or precautionary measures that are born from this concept may include choosing “safe” walking routes, deciding who is allowed in your house, locking doors or simply, remaining overly alert to maintain a sense of personal safety.

Analysing the “factory” as a site of production plays a central role in my practice-led research. Approached from a metaphorical perspective, the repetitive nature of labour associated with factories extends beyond symbolism, enabling the viewer to visualise the cyclical nature of violence. By integrating this analogy into my practice, I emphasise the on-going process of control, pervasive fear and the unbroken continuity of these dynamics. The repetitive labour of hand-making tiles and brick pavers becomes a deliberate act, a form of ritual through which I, the artist engage in a continuous act of (factory-like) labour. As Gqola (2021:60) argues, fear exists both as a personal emotional experience and a public phenomenon, one that becomes an integral part of sustaining power. Similarly it is an instinctive emotion shaped on past and present emotional experiences, processed both subconsciously and consciously (Gqola 2021:61).

In *Gender Inequality, Violence Against Women, and Fear,* Carrie L. Yodanis (2004:671) affirms that “sexual violence is associated with a culture of women’s fear. As rates of sexual violence in a country increase, a woman does not personally have to be a victim of violence to feel more fearful” (Yodanis 2004:671). Aligning with Yodanis’ statement, particularly the last line, it is evident that fear is not only unsettling, but rather should be understood to shape a woman’s sense of safety. This fear is not tied to a specific incident or threat; but rather to the environment that an individual is exposed to.

While some may dismiss women’s fears for personal safety as irrational, statistical reports confirm these fears. According to the Non-Profit Organisation (NGO) *Women For Change* (2025) advocating against Gender Based Violence and Femicide in South Africa—every day in South Africa, there is roughly 15 women who are murdered, and 117 women report rape

cases to the police. Recent statics further reveal that 5,578 women and 1,656 children were killed, with an increase in femicide by 33.8% compared to the year 2024 (Womenforchange.co.za, 2025). While, 42,569 rape cases were reported, it is estimated that roughly 95% of rape cases go unreported (Womenforchange.co.za, 2025).

In a News 24 article titled 'Educate your sons!": *Hundreds gather in protest against GBV and femicide*, journalist Rosetta Msimango (2025) reports that on 11 April 2025, a petition with over 150,000 signatures was signed in a call to end the ongoing cycle of femicide in South Africa. "We are tired. We have nothing left in us, and enough is enough," pleaded Lesego Mahlangu, a representative for *Women For Change* (Msimango, 2025).

This brings me to Avery F. Gordon*'s Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* where Gordon (1997:106) asserts, "He is not me, the ghostly matter will not go away. It is waiting for you and it will shadow you and it will outwit all your smart moves as that jungle grows thicker and deeper." Building on Gordon's observation, I think of femicide as a shadow, hidden and quietly treading behind women. A shadow that only resurfaces when actively investigated. This metaphor aligns with my understanding of feminist theory on violence, which expresses that not all women will be victims of violence, however many will feel its consequences (Yodanis 2004:671).

Moreover, Gqola (2021:76) explores how fear has become a built-in aspect of what it means to be a woman or young girl-child. Young girls are not just simply "kept safe" through measures put into place, but are reminded to "be safe" themselves. Likewise, in *Patriarchy and women's subordination: A theoretical analysis*, author Abeda Sultana (2010:2) asserts that to quickly feel fear operates as both a weapon and a mechanism of control, one that is rooted in traditional systems dominated by men, known as patriarchy.[3] In this regard, fear is not an aimless emotion, but rather intended to be seen through the lens of the lived realities of being a woman.

[3] Patriarchy refers to the male domination both in public and private spheres. Feminists mainly use the term 'patriarchy' to describe the power relationship between men and women. Thus, patriarchy is more than just a term; feminists use it like a concept, and like all other concepts it is a tool to help us understand women's realities (Sultana, 2010:2).

In the article *The complex case of fear and safe space* (2010), Barbara S. Stengel's (2010:529), drawing upon philosopher John Dewey's perspective, notes that "fear is not an instinct but a form of experience." Dewey's (cited in Stengel 2010:529) interpretation of fear, proposes an experience rather than an instinct. This perspective informs my studio practice through the choice of material, reference photographs, and symbolic gestures. As I reflect on how fear is often collectively transmitted, I draw on Dewey's (cited in Stengel 2010:529) idea that fear emerges from memory and daily encounters. In this article, I observe how fear is a conditioned reaction, shaped by past encounters, personal experiences and childhood memories.

This perspective holds a deep personal significance. As the stories my Mum would tell me transcend casual advice, functioning rather as a means of protection. These generational exchanges have shaped my mindset and the trajectory of my practice. I think of fear as quietly carried yet collectively shared. This narrative aspect of how fear is transmitted generationally introduces the notion of storytelling. In *Stories and Storytelling: Personalizing the Social Studies* (1994), authors, Martha Combs and John D. Beach (1994:464), propose that storytelling has a natural yet powerful effect on human beings, asserting that "the human brain is essentially a narrative device. It runs on stories."

In this way, Combs and Beach (1994:464) suggest that storytelling can exert an inherent influence, furthermore, stating that, "the stories that are part of the fabric of our lives are personal narratives." In the context of my mini-thesis, storytelling functions like weaving a tapestry, interlacing elements such as emotions, truth and experience to construct a captivating, and engaging narrative. Often, I find myself revisiting a specific memory from my childhood, at the age of twelve, a moment that signified a pivotal shift in storytelling, unlike my usual bedtime stories. It was a story my mum referred to as "a warning signal." I remember it so well, it was a Sunday night, nothing out of the ordinary. My bedtime routine was complete as usual; I had eaten, bathed, and dressed into my pyjamas. Sitting on the edge of my bed as my mum carefully combed and neatly styled my hair for the night, with my sisters in the corner absorbed in their own conversation, she began talking, and I listened attentively. She asked if we had heard the story of "Pinky Pinky.[4]" As the only daughter listening, I responded with a quiet

[4] In the article *All the things you could be by now if Pinky Pinky wasn't your Madam: Black gender, human subjectivity and the terror of solidarity* (2022) explains that there is an urban legend in South Africa, called

"no". Turning my head slightly towards her, I noticed her eyes softened, perhaps sensing my innocence. She began by describing "Pinky Pinky" as a mystical, animalistic creature, who is invisible to boys but recognisable to little girls. She explained that the creature has a strange appearance and lurked in the corners of bathrooms, waiting to attack. Skipping over the gruesome details—I believe she did this on purpose to shield us from the dark truth of sexual abuse and, possibly from asking too many questions—she continued by explaining that "Pinky Pinky" is a creature who finds pleasure in targeting little girls who wore pink underwear under their school uniforms, and would harm them. With wide eyes, I stared at her and ask innocently, "But why Mummy?" feeling defeated, she responded, "I don't know, Poplap,[5]" before softly adding, "We live in a scary world". As her 'bedtime story' came to an awkward end, and my eyelids heavied she tucked me into bed, while gently squeezing my hand, her usual gesture to say "goodnight" before her and my sisters quietly tip-toed out of the room.

Now, as a twenty-five-year-old young woman who no longer identifies as a naïve little girl, I come to understand the importance of the story my mum once called "a warning signal." Never fully grasping the weight of my mother's words, I am confronted with the reality today. Authors Combs and Beach (1994:468) propose that storytelling comprises of four essential components: to experience, to think, to act and to say. These elements represent the core processes of storytelling, and when integrated, they effectively communicate the story told. As I recall my Mum's story, I see the power of storytelling, and how it subconsciously shaped my perspective of reality, especially when rooted in truth. Drawing upon Gqola's (2021) theme in her book, I adopt her use of storytelling to deepen my reality on female fear.

Additionally, I revisit Stengel's observation of the term 'habituated fear' in her article *The Complex Case of Fear and Safe Space* (2010). Stengel (2010:532) explains that, "Habituated fear involves reading openness to the world as dangerous—based on often skewed narratives of past experience and association—and that danger is anticipated as a future pain or injury." Put simply, habituated fear arises when an individual is regularly exposed to fear-induced scenarios, irrespective of the level of danger.

'Pinky Pinky'. Known to have emerged in 1990s and early 2000s, 'Pinky Pinky' is proposed as a pink hybrid creature, half man, half woman that hurts prepubescent child in school toilets (Nkopo 2022:92).

[5] "Poplap"—an Afrikaans term of endearment my mother uses frequently when addressing my sisters and I. The term translates to "doll" or "sweetheart" in English.

Returning to my Mum's idea of a warning signal; as time progresses, such stories are internalised and sustain a sense of awareness. An example of this phenomenon is a movement inspired by initiatives in Delhi, India and South America, recently introduced to Cape Town, South Africa by sociologist and professor Amrita Pande. The initiative is called Women Who Walk at (Almost) Midnight in Cape Town, a movement encouraging large groups of women to walk the streets of Cape Town, responding to the ingrained, habitual fear of the public sphere that many women experience, and live with. In the news article, 'Women take to the streets of Cape Town at night to create awareness on women safety' (2023), journalist Kaylynne Bantom (2023) explains that this movement was created in the hope of reclaiming public spaces for woman, who can in so doing experience a sense of control over their own bodies while challenging existing frameworks that perpetuate gendered violence (Bantom, 2023).

That said, journalist Wesley Ford (2023) reports in the news article, 'Women reclaim streets at night in safety initiative', that Pande encapsulates the experience of these women, explaining that, "All women want to walk in public spaces, day or night, without fear, but rarely are we able to without a sense of fear, without holding on to whatever we feel will protect us from the predator lurking around and without our hearts beating in our mouths." While the initiative may be empowering for many women in the short duration, offering a temporary sense of relief, it eventually remains just that, *a moment*. For me, fear is considered a boundary-setting force, taking control of my movements, and often that of many other women, if not all. Unfortunately, even in the wake of feeling liberated, female fear remains a shadowing presence.

1.2 Space and place (familiar/ unfamiliar)

> *There is no safety, only the dull awareness of the possibility of safety perpetually deferred. From childhood, girls are taught to bear the burden of responsibility for a system designed to cut us down individually at best, or annihilate us all at worst.*
>
> Pumla Dineo Gqola (2021:115)

In both my art practice and everyday life, I engage with space and place as a challenging term that positions elements of familiarity and unfamiliarity together. From my experience, I have observed how environments that initially feel known and safe can quickly shift into spaces of discomfort, especially for women. To illustrate this, let me set the scene for you: it's a late

Autumn afternoon, where the sun lingers low and the air is cool. You're quietly sitting crossed-legged on a bench reading a book in your hometown park, a place you know intimately. The giggling of little children playing ball is faintly heard in the distance. Glancing up between pages, you catch a glimpse of a group of mums pushing strollers while a dog, off-leash runs back and forth. Saturated by a tiny circle of warmth, you are comforted by the familiarity, as the commotion brings a sense of ease. However, as time begins to pass by, the faint giggling voices fade further and further away into the distance. The mums have packed their strollers, and the playful dog is now nowhere to be seen. Yet, there you are, still quietly seated on your chosen bench. Remaining in the same space for a few more minutes to watch the sun disappear below the horizon, as the night sky slowly begins to reveals itself. The air is cooler than before and what was a golden ring of sunlight has transformed into a pale, silvery crescent-shaped orb in the midnight-sky. The comforting background noise of giggles and laughter is cut by an unfamiliar silence, triggering an alertness and a creeping concern over safety, once unquestioned, and now potentially compromised.

This lived reality draws me to reflect on Tim Cresswell's[6] book, *Place: A Short Introduction* (2004), literature that I found to be relevant to my research. He argues that while the characteristics of the term space may at first appear neutral, it gains emotional resonance through social interaction, memory, and lived experience (Cresswell, 2004:21). He writes:

> Space is amorphous and intangible and not an entity that can be directly described and analysed. Yet, however we feel or explain space, there is nearly always some associated sense or concept of place. In general it seems that space provides the context for places but derives its meaning from particular places (Cresswell, 2004:21).

What stands out in Cresswell's argument is the idea that space becomes place through layers of interaction and personal history. The distinction between space and place is defined through the smallest characteristics that seamlessly shift to redefine a place, and alter how one feels, perceives, and relates to it. According to Cresswell (2004:7) 'place' appears to be self-explanatory, due to our human familiarity with dwelling within it. However Cresswell (2004:7) argues that the term place is defined through three interrelated aspects: location (the

[6] Tim Cresswell is a Professor in Social and Cultural Geography at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth. While also the author of In Place/ Out of Place (1996) and the co-editor of Engaging Film (2002).

geographical point); locale (the material setting); and the sense of place (the emotional and symbolic attachments we have to a location).
By identifying the term place, he positions it not as a tangible site, but rather, as one that is shaped by experiences and interactions (Cresswell, 2004:11). Through my own narrative, I illustrates how a sense of place can be temporary or fragile, shifting and transforming easily.

In my practice I engage with the idea of space, one that is charged with emotion and open to interpretive meaning. I experience space as a general environment, and open to interpretive meaning, one that can't be directly described and holds limited significance in its untouched state, but only gaining meaning when imbued with personal and subjective encounters. While Creswell (2004:21) outlines space as "amorphous and intangible," from my perspective, I understand it as a neutral environment that acquires meaning through lived experiences. Place, by contrast, takes shape when an environment acquires meaning through presence, stories and histories. These traces alter an abstract environment into a site that is remembered, and socially meaningful. In this way, the distinction between the terms space and place become a key focus of my practice.

To encapsulate Cresswell's insight within my research, my exhibition centres on flooring, an often overlooked element. Yet, when closely attended to, flooring becomes our first point of contact in any space, physically grounding us while quietly capturing traces of human presence. These surfaces, while overlooked, carry immense personal significance. While I will unpack this observation further in chapter two, it is important to acknowledge the depth of engaging with this quotidian but fragile concept. In so doing, I recognise how we, as women imprint our own stories onto these surfaces, and by so doing, the space itself is transformed into a personal remembered 'place'. This subtle transformation captures the essence of Cresswell's (2004) argument, asserting how meaning-making and continuous engagement transitions the term 'space' into a remembered 'place'.

In this context, Maxine Felder (2021:181), in her article 'Familiarity as a practical sense of place' (2021) defines familiarity as "knowing or recognizing someone or something well." Applying the above to my practice: familiarity shapes how we perceive, observe and engage with our surroundings, while it may bring comfort and ease, it also has the potential to alter and shift in relation to unforeseen factors (Felder, 2021:180). If space is as transformative and

unpredictable as Cresswell (2004:75) suggests, then the sense of security attached to familiar spaces becomes precarious. This insight draws me to reflect on Gqola's (2021:115) assertion that "there is no safety, only the dull awareness of the possibility of safety perpetually deferred." A reminder that space does not always equate to comfort and familiarity, but rather exists as a transient state, shadowed by an ever-present potential for threat and disruption.

Expanding on the relationship between space and place. In the article 'Perception and action' (2010), authors Creem-Regehr and Kunz (2010), offer an interesting distinction in spatial cognition by clarifying the difference between "egocentric" and "allocentric" spatial reference frames. The term "egocentric" refers to the understanding of spatial relationships in connection to the observer's view while "allocentric" references focus on the spatial relationship between objects (Creem-Regehr and Kunz 2010:800). In the context of my practice, I observe egocentric spatial relations as shaped by how events are subjectively experienced within a space. For example encounters that entail discomfort or a sense of unease can embed a sense of vulnerability into a women's perception of these environments, effectively transforming familiar places into spaces marked by uncertainty and discomfort.

Building on my understanding of space, I refer to Ruth Salvaggio's[7] (1998), *Theory and Space, Space and Woman,* which introduces the concept of 'spacecritics'. Salvaggio (1998:262) explains this approach as, moving beyond fixed definitions of space, instead assessing the intricate ways that space functions and shapes an individual's experience. Salvaggio's (1998:262) phrase from my perspective proposes space as deeply tied to the body. From my view point, this observation positions space to be closely tied to the body: our experiences and past encounters in particular spaces leave traces—our bodies remember the spaces we've moved through, and those spaces, in turn, shape how we feel and respond within them.

Expanding on the reciprocity of space, I consider my own behaviour in both private and public spaces—as I often pause and observe how strangers have walked on the same surface I have walked on, unaware of the experiences others may have endured in the very same space. These unseen histories linger, quietly inscribed in the materiality of the surfaces beneath our feet. It

[7] Ruth Salvaggio occupation is a Professor Emerita of English Literature and American Studies at the University of North Carolina; her research is broadly based in poetry and feminist theory, such as her book The sounds of feminist theory (1998).

is in these moments of stillness that I remind myself that each crack and groove bears ghostly traces, forming a silent archive of human presence.

The surface of a floor is more than just a structural element; it becomes a site where unspoken secrets are tightly held together. In *Understanding events: From perception to action* (2008), Authors Thomas F. Shipley and Jeffrey M. Zacks (2008:5) argue that having a nuanced understanding of any space is fundamental as humans tend to recall events that occurred within a space rather than focusing on its architectural details. This reflection showed me that any space no matter how familiar, does not guarantee sense of safety, and has the potential to feel unfamiliar within minutes

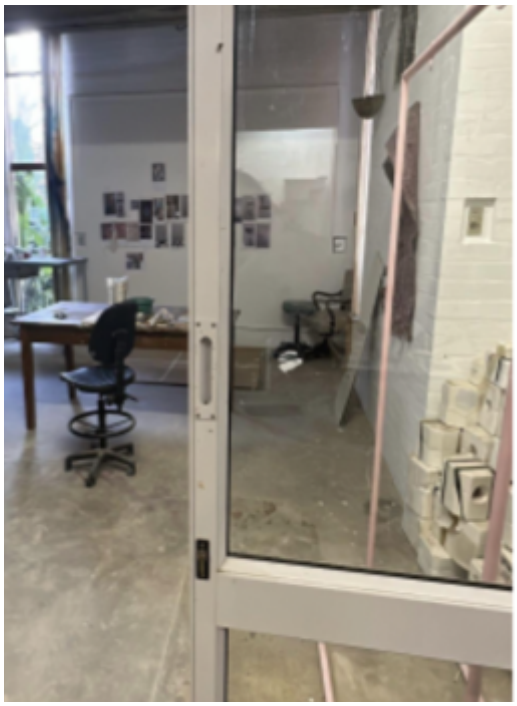

Figure 13: Caryn Le Kay, *My Art Studio*, Rhodes University (2023).

Figure 14: Caryn Le Kay, *Floor Surface of my Art Studio*, Rhodes University (2023).

To illustrate this, I included a photograph of the exterior of my art studio (Figure 13), alongside a close-up photograph of the surface of the floor (Figure 14), together, these two photographs forms a story of a space I consider non-threating. Then an unusual encounter took place: On one particular day my studio was quieter than usual. With headphones cupped over my head, immersed in my art-making, I became aware that someone, that I had never seen before stood

at the door frame of my studio, claiming to have lost their key. Our exchange was brief, but strange, I awkwardly smiled and apologised for being unable to assist. This specific encounter, altered my perception of my studio space in a moment; in turn also, impacting my art practice. Returning to my studio days later I photographed the exact section of flooring where the encounter took place (Figure 14). Photographing the floor surface became my way of documenting this shift.

Figure 15: *The Remnants of Space* (2024). Porcelain Floor Surface Trace, photography by Leroy Payne.

Figure 16: Caryn Le Kay, *The Remnants of Space* (2024). Porcelain Floor Surface Trace, photography by Leroy Payne.

Figure 17: Caryn Le Kay, *The Remnants of Space* (2024). Porcelain Floor Surface Trace photography by Leroy Payne.

As my practice evolved, I move the attention away from the individual who stood there to the surface beneath their feet (Figures 15-17). By tracing the floor's organic pattern I preserve more than a surface, I set out to hold onto the memory of that encounter. By pressing the porcelain clay into the crevices of the studio floor, rolled gently with a rolling pin to absorb the texture, then lifting it away, I was able to retain the trace left behind.

The act of replicating the surface as it existed in that exact moment serves as a way of archiving a physical space and a remembered place (Creswell 2004:7). The textured surface challenges the notion of space as fixed, highlighting how it transitions between those who have traversed upon it and those who still will. This perspective resonates with Salvaggio (1998:264) who expresses that, "This new space of interactions privileges the self, the 'I,' the perceiver who shares the space of the literary." Here, the "I" refers to the individual engaging with the space, emphasising how personal experience, emotional response and interpretation take precedence. As my research is focussed on fragmented floor surfaces as literal sites of traces– one where I, and many others have walked on. Through the pieces that I have made and selectively displayed for this mini-thesis (Figures 15-21), I capture the remaining presence of human contact, recorded in the surface of the wet porcelain clay.

Figure 18: Caryn Le Kay, *The Remnants of Space* (2024). Porcelain Floor Surface Trace, photography by Leroy Payne.

Figure 19: Caryn Le Kay, *The Remnants of Space* (2024). Porcelain Floor Surface Trace, photography by Leroy Payne.

Through the progression of this series, the up-close photographs of these fragmented pieces become an integral part of my body of work and conceptual framework. The specs of dirt and debris clusters that rest on the surface of the plinth are not accidental, but form part of the visual and material dialogue between the surface and the site it occupies (Figure 17-21). The dirt

particles are embedded within the porcelain, while also loosely scattered across the plinth drawing attention to spatial residue.

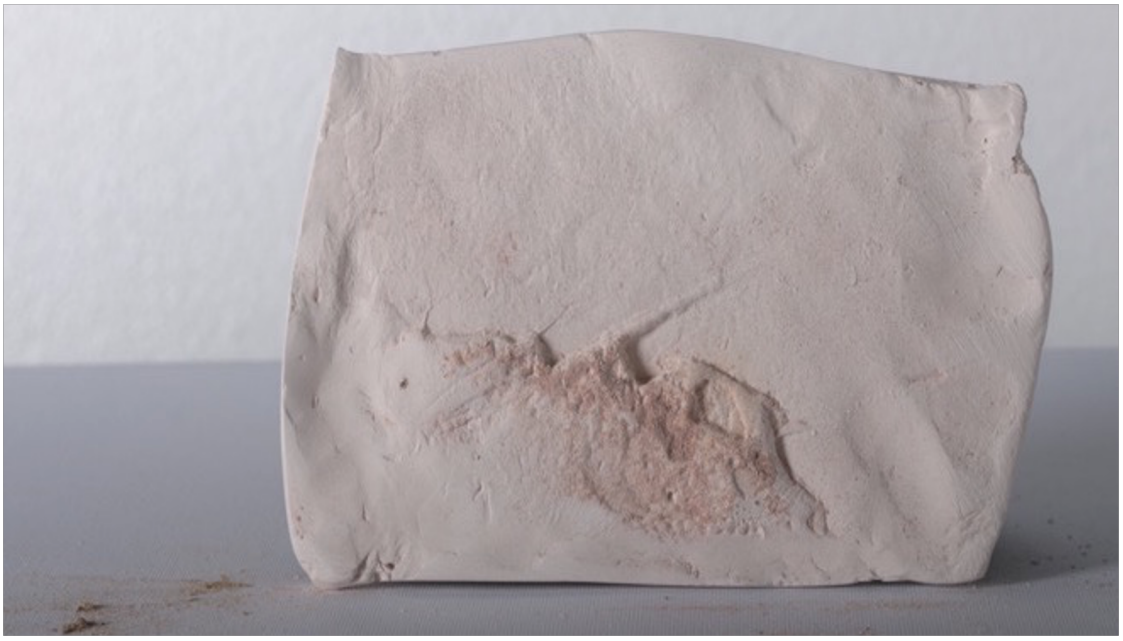

Figure 20: Caryn Le Kay, *The Remnants of Space* (2024). Porcelain Floor Surface Trace, photography by Leroy Payne.

By isolating this quiet moment of relational tension (Creem-Regehr and Kunz 2010), I am able to present two important perspectives. The first perspective being the fine grained micro clusters that with the slightest touch[8] can disperse (Figure 19), and the second perspective being the remnants of space that are captured and reordered through the choice and use of porcelain (Figure 15-21). These material remnants are not accidental by-products, forming an integral part of the narrative of my practice.

In my decision to use porcelain, I was drawn to its dual qualities: its pliable nature when wet allows it to retrieve the finest impressions, and when fired it preserves those marks permanently. This responsiveness makes porcelain a suitable medium for recording subtle textures, yet at the same time it remains fragile in nature. A material that both, physically and metaphorically captures a remnant of space, and transitions into a tangible artifact. To illustrate

[8] According to Katherine Fries (2017:114), “touch is an immediate sensation, a present time experience. It is more than just temporal; touch is impermanent”, further explaining the importance of how one encounters the sensory experience of materials in her postdoctoral dissertation.

the traces left by physical contact, I have positioned an isolated block-like form of bisque-fired porcelain up-right against a neutral background to avoid visual noise (Figures. 16, 17 and 20). Focusing on the fragmented piece of porcelain and its reddish residue embedded into the clay's surface, I highlight prior physical contact that operates as a trace. The textural appearance of the porcelain and embedded debris forms a quiet tension, blurring the line between what is part of the clay and what is not.

Figure 21: Caryn Le Kay, *The Remnants of Space* (2024). Porcelain Floor Surface Trace, photography by Leroy Payne.

The simple composition of four fragmented porcelain blocks leaning against one another foregrounds the material interactions of these markers of space and place through residue and impressions formed, highlighting the traces of previous contact (Figure 21). This intentional arrangement foregrounds the tactile and visual interactions of materials, offering more than a sculptural display—an abstract mapping of spatial memory.

Through close observation and the imagined act of touch, the audience of these works are encouraged to engage with traces of time, preserved in ceramic form. This materialisation resonates with Shipley and Zacks' (2008:5) observation that our understanding of space is shaped more by the recollection of experiences, rather than its architectural specifics. In this way, this series is an embodied *carrier* of the ephemeral presence of human presence in space

and place, fixed through the permanence of fired clay. I consider my art studio both private and public: many students have occupied this space before me, and many will follow. This overlap of individual and shared experience positions the studio as a liminal space, neither fully private nor fully public, allowing my practice to engage directly with the tension between these spatial conditions. In so doing, I extend my research to engage with the tension between private and public spatial environments.

In the book *Public and Private, Power and Space* (1997), James Ted Killian's (1997:116) explores public space as a site of contact—one that lies in a liminal space, neither intimate nor anonymous. Introducing a middle ground where encounters are familiar yet detached, shaped first by shared perspectives, then personal experience. My practice reflects the layered nature of shared environments: spaces we move through and remember, even if we don't consider them our own. These spaces are not neutral, they are shaped by presence and absence.

Figure 22: *Clariench Post Office*. Good Image (2025).

Similarly, in *Familiarity as a practical sense of place,* Felder (2021:12) cities Sarah Ahmed's argument that "spaces acquire the shape of the bodies that 'inhabit' them . . . spaces 'record' the repetition of acts, and the 'passing by' of some and not others". This insight holds weight when remembering the brutal rape and murder of nineteen-year old student Uyinene Mrwetyana at the Clariench Post Office near the University of Cape Town (Bukola Adebayo, 2019).

In her 2019 article for The New Yorker, ‘The Death of Uyinene Mrwetyana and the Rise of South Africa’s “Am I Next?”’ journalist Rosa Lyster (2019) describes the Post Office to be situated on a busy road in Cape Town’s Southern suburbs, between a Police Station and a high school. The Post Office entrance is paved with brick pavers a common surface layout found in public spaces (Figure 22). However, this is also the surface Mrwetyana walked on for the last time. Her death shocked many South Africans, as a mundane space like a Post Office was never considered a site of severe danger and vulnerability.

This tragic turn of events deeply shaped my perception of how any space, no matter how mundane has the potential for danger to exist. In this growing awareness of the dangers present in public spaces, I return to the words of Gqola, (2021:113) who writes: “South African women live with the burden of constant vigilance”. In response to the generic public surfaces walked on by all women in public spaces, I created a series of 120 handmade porcelain brick pavers (Figure 23-25). This series reflects on the repetition and anonymity of public floor surfaces treaded upon by victims and perpetrators alike.

Figure 23: Caryn Le Kay, *The Remnants of Space* (2024). Porcelain Brick Paver, photography by Leroy Payne.

Figure 24: Caryn Le Kay, *The Remnants of Space* (2024). Porcelain Brick Paver, photography by Leroy Payne.

Within my exhibition, *Remnant of Space* (2025), I explore the presence, fragility and the potential for disruption. The dark wine red glazed pavers become quiet monuments, indicators of daily life made personal and mournful (Figures 23-25). Through their visceral colour palette and sculptural presence, the porcelain brick pavers transition from being practical, serviceable structures to quiet memorials that encapsulate the tension of public spaces. The curated display (Figure 23) depicts three red glazed paving bricks with white trimming positioned in formation. While in a second photograph (Figure 24), the paving bricks are positioned leaning and resting against each other in an unstable, almost delicate composition. Within my practice, the paving bricks act as metaphors quietly holding the space of remembrance and collectively telling a spectral story of human presence.

The dark red coloured glaze speaks to how the body absorbs violence without revealing it, and how shared environments can be sites of contact and rupture. In walking across public space, we perform a collective routine. However, when we pause, and take time to reflect on whose footsteps were interrupted, whose bodies no longer pass, we are confronted with hidden and untold stories ingrained and preserved in the surface beneath us.

Figure 25: Caryn Le Kay, *The Remnants of Space* (2024). Porcelain Brick Paver, photography by Leroy Payne.

In Figure 25 two vibrant cherry red brick pavers present a contrast to two muted pink glazed brick pavers, immediately draw attention and shift the colour tone from traditional coloured brick pavers into forms reminiscent of bodily forms The choice of the cherry red porcelain coloured brick paver transforms the functional element of an ordinary brick paver, to that of a warning sign. This vibrant red glaze introduces visual disruption, commanding the audience to stop and pause. Pairing the cherry red brick with the muted pink coloured bricks builds tension. Red shouts while, pink whispers. The two distinct colours introduce a quiet and invisible pause, foregrounding the presence of violence that is not always acted upon but often, quietly sits ingrained within both familiar and unfamiliar spaces.

1.3 The shadow pandemic

> *Apparently fear is expected of women*
>
> Caroline Paul (cited in Gqola 2021:67)

In my practice, I consider how the home, traditionally a safe space, has the potential to also be a site of danger. In March 2020, South Africa experienced a historic and alarming event. President Cyril Ramaphosa declared a 21-day national lock-down with immediate effect, confining many South Africans to only their homes as the spread of Coronavirus[9] began to escalate. Experiencing a national lock-down firsthand, I can confirm that it was a frightening and confusing period. Moreover, on March 24, 2020 News 24 expressed the severity in an article titled, 'Coronavirus national lockdown 101: What you need to know', explicitly stating: "No one will be allowed to leave their homes for the 21 days unless under strictly controlled circumstances, including seeking medical care, buying food, medicine or other supplies and collecting social grants." In the midst of a lockdown, during the spread of the Coronavirus pandemic, self-isolation became the standard practice.

In the article, 'Impact of COVID-19 lockdown and link to women and children's experiences of violence in the home in South Africa' Pinky Mahlangul, Andrew Gibbs, Nwabisa Shai1, Mercilene Machisal, N Nunze1 and Yandisa Sikweyiya1 (2022), explain that Covid-19 fostered an additional threat: an increase in violence against women and children within confined spaces, such as homes. Spaces considered safe before shifted into places of fear and danger (Geldenhuys, 2021). As Gender-Based Violence increased, Tia Haralabakos (2021) reports that United Nations Women's Executive Director, Sima Bahou, coined the term 'Shadow Pandemic'. This concept of 'The Shadow Pandemic' reflects an unsettling, dual reality of female fear—a theme I visually delve into within my body of work.

Here, I turn to the work of South African visual artist, Penny Siopis who through a cinematic exploration addresses the reality of the shadow pandemic. In her film *Shadow Shame Again* (2021), Siopis engages with a filmic approach, integrating fragments of 8mm and 16mm film

[9] COVID-19 on the 4th of March 2020. On the night of the 23rd of March 2020, the South African government announced a 21-day national lockdown known as "Alert level 5" to come into effect from 26 March to 16 April 2020 (Mahlangul et al. 2022:2).

footage sourced from flea markets. In foreboding the fragile boundary between life and violence, at first glance, the film documents a celebratory moment, however Siopis puts emphasis on the idea that these moments can quickly be taken away, without hesitation.

In her film, *Shadow Shame Again* an elegy to Tshegofatso Pule. A 28-year old, South African woman, whose lifeless, stabbed body was found hanging from a tree while eight months pregnant, in Roodepoort's Durban Deep (Simelane 2022). The film documents the joyful moments of individuals unknown to the artist; acquiring an unsettling undertone when placed in the context of gendered violence.

Figure 26: Penny Siopis. *Shadow Shame Again*, (2021,00:01:08). [Digital video] South Africa. Available at: https//www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uva9foMfws0 [Accessed 25 April 2025).

In the still frame (Figure 26), the silhouette of a young carefree child looking directly at the lens of the video camera, amongst tree branches is shown to be in the process of climbing a tree as their arms are wrapped around the trunk of the tree. While the visual at first depicts innocence and play, it takes on an unsettling tone when viewed through the lens of femicide and the circumstances of Tshegofatso Pule's death. The tree, formerly a symbol of play has now transitioned into a metaphor for mourning and violence; casting as a shadow over South Africa.

In an online interview I conducted with Siopis[10] on 4 October 2024, I asked about the significance of the term "shadow" within a South African context. She reflected on the connotation of the term *shadow*—specifying that "It is always there while the person it is tied to is on the earth" (Siopis 2024). Her observation foregrounds the inescapable reality of femicide, like a shadow its lingering presence hovers, remaining quietly present. According to Xiao (2005:7) the shadow is defined to be "ephemeral, silent and subtle. We cannot touch or clutch it. It hovers somewhere between the physicality of 'real' and the non-physicality of 'unreal'. It is intangible".

In this context, the shadow becomes a metaphor for female fear, weighted with meaning and deeply felt. Siopis visualises the shadow through the films interplay of violence and memory. Framed between absence and presence, it quietly persists. Siopis elaborates on the mythological undertones of the term, noting that the "Shadow is well theorised as a double but often perceived in everyday experience as secondary (insubstantial) to the figure (substantial) that it is tied to. Thus the implications of death. Shadows are also called shades in mythology, people who have passed. Ancestors. Associations are endless" (Siopis, 2024). For that reason, the perception of the shadow emerges as that of a figure who watches and holds untold narratives.

[10] On 4 October 2024, I conducted an interview with Penny Siopis, which we agreed to have in written form due to logistical constraints. My primary focus was her 2021 film *Shadow Shame Again* (2021), a work that engages with themes of female fear, Covid-19, the shadow pandemic, and archival imagery. To frame the discussion, I developed a set of ten questions that referred back to the film, exploring the origins of its inspiration, her conceptual approach followed by her intentions in relation to how audiences might interpret and respond to the film.

Figure 27: Penny Siopis. *Shadow Shame Again*, (2021,00:00:57). [Digital video] South Africa. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uva9foMfws0 [Accessed 25 April 2025].

Figure 28:Penny Siopis. *Shadow Shame Again,* (2021,00:01:02). [Digital video] South Africa. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uva9foMfws0 [Accessed 25 April 2025).

Siopis extends her body of work through visual story-telling, text and sound. Showing no trace of Tshegofatso Pule, Siopis draws attention to the trace of a woman who was once there, through the use of subtitles below the images. Phrases like “no witness,” “but me,” (Figures

27-28) signal an absent presence. Further unspoken words spread throughout the film, read as: hanged/stabbed/raped/with child (Figures 29-32). The subtitles not only represent the acts of violence she endured, but in this way the 'shadow' becomes a witness, the observer of the violence. The film moves beyond violence, drawing attention to the idea of silence through the use of seemingly innocuous imagery juxtaposed by alarming subtitles. It extends the idea that in absence, there is presence and in the silence, there is a story.

Figure 29: Penny Siopis. *Shadow Shame Again*, (2021,00:01:21). [Digital video] South Africa. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uva9foMfws0 [Accessed 25 April 2025].

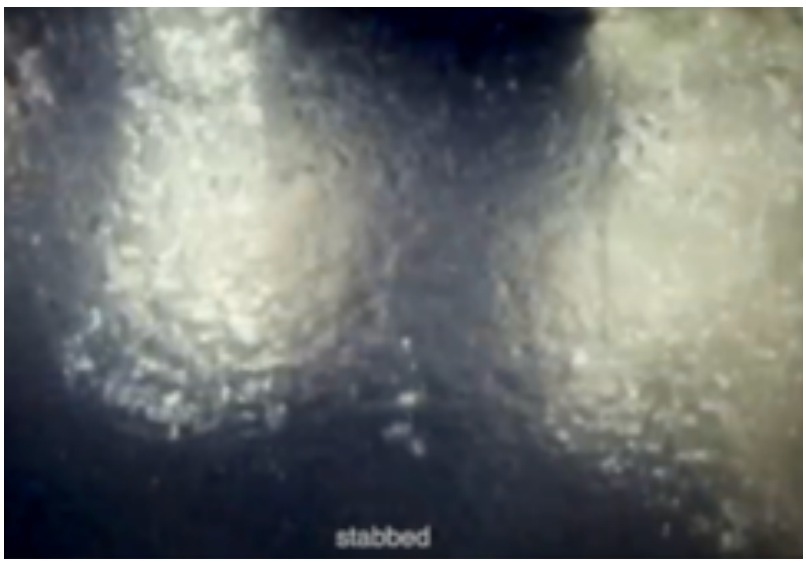

Figure 30: Penny Siopis. *Shadow Shame Again*, (2021,00:01:23). [Digital video] South Africa. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uva9foMfws0 [Accessed 25 April 2025].

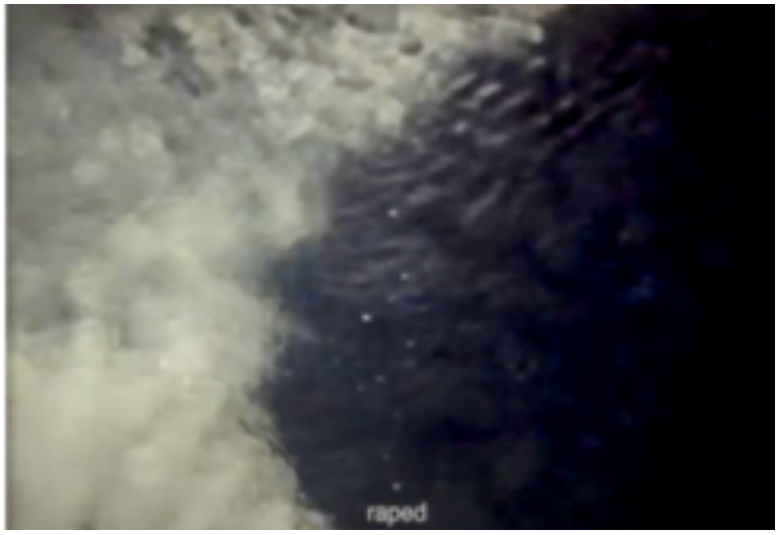

Figure 31:Penny Siopis. *Shadow Shame Again*, (2021,01:28). [Digital video] South Africa. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uva9foMws0 [Accessed 25 April 2025].

Figure 32: Penny Siopis. *Shadow Shame Again,* (2021,00:01:31). [Digital video] South Africa. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uva9foMws0 [Accessed 25 April 2025].

Siopis goes on to include the rendition of the song "*Askies I'm Sorry"* sung by Nelson Mandela University student, Mbali Ngube in response to the murder of Tshegofatso Pule. In an article 'The painful feeling that connects us: Artist Penny Siopis on the empathetic potential of shame and vulnerability' (2021) published by Daily Maverick, Emma Dollery (2021) cites Siopis, noting that "The song, which sounds like it is sung by a choir of multiple people, was actually made with an app. Ngube layered recordings of herself over one another to create the final product (Dollery 2021). "Even though she is alone, she's singing as if she is many people. I

thought that was very empowering" (Dollery 2021). By including Ngube's rendition, Siopis highlights how female fear exists both as a personal and collective *shadow* experience.

This duality is important when considering how space is remembered and experienced. Reflecting on the role of human memory, authors Michael J. Lomas, Eunice Ayodeji and Philip Brown (2023: 26219), states in 'Imagined places of the past: the interplay of time and memory in the maintenance of attachment' (2023) that:

> From this position place attachment is seen to connect the present to the past, through the biographical experiences and memories associated with a particular space. Longer inhabitation means more experiences and, as a result, more memories.

Our senses often reconnect us, without any warning to certain memories of times and specific places. In this way I often find myself reflecting on childhood, I am taken back to my grandparents' home. A space embodied with comfort and familiarity, throughout childhood and adulthood. Yet, even the presumed safe space hold the potential for harm.

Figure 33: Ma and Pa's home. Google Image (2024).

In this context, I titled a Google photograph *Ma and Pa's home* (Figure 33). The title reflects my personal connection to the space, as the term 'Ma' is used to address my grandmother and 'Pa' to address my grandfather. Growing up and living two minutes away from their home, my sisters and I would often be seen running up the street to visit them.

During these visits, Pa would regularly find me clinging to Ma in her kitchen, a space, that exuded warmth and radiated love, which became my favourite space in their home. Our quality time consisted of being in the kitchen preparing food mixtures of some sort, be it for flapjacks, pizza or biscuits. While, the space remains familiar in my mind, of all the details in that space, their floor tiles in the kitchen are vividly imprinted on my mind. This surface became a meaningful site of reflection within my body of work, a material trace of familiarity that invites a reconsideration of how space can be both felt and also easily misunderstood.

Figure 34: *Ma's kitchen tiles.* Caryn Le Kay (2023).

In my aerial photographs of Ma's *kitchen tiles* (Figure 34) the chipped, cracked and weathered condition of the floor tiles becomes evident. Although this space is familiar and bears special memories for me, it also takes on new meaning as it is visibly marked by wear and tear. What I associate as loving memories; to a stranger, might be viewed as a space of damage. This contrast made me reflect on the subjectivity of experiences of space.

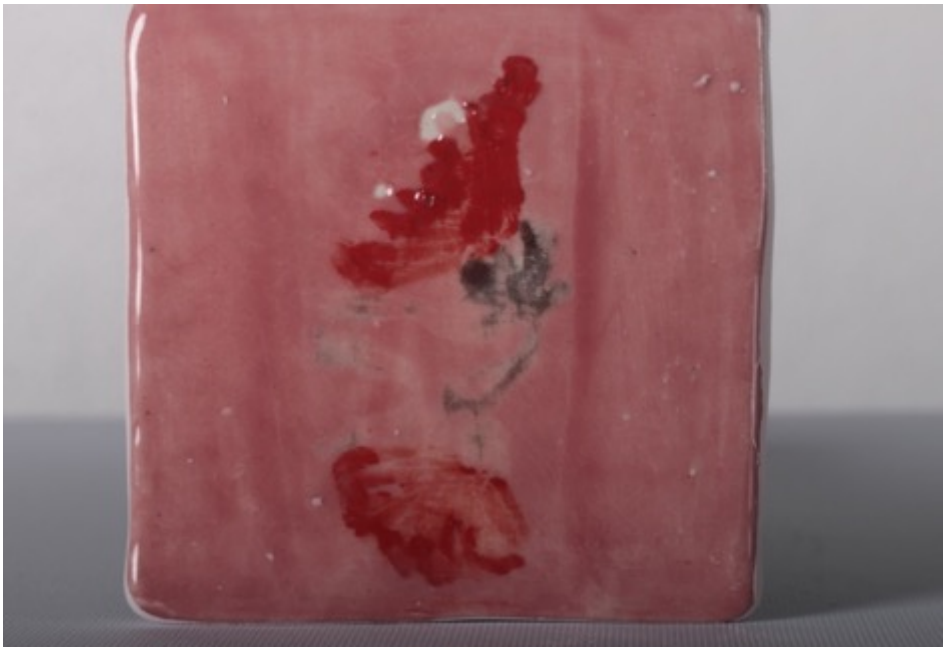

Figure 35: Caryn Le Kay, *Ma's rendition* (2024). Porcelain, glazed tile, photography by Leroy Payne.

Figure 36: Caryn Le Kay, Ma's rendition (2024). Porcelain, glazed tile, photography by Leroy Payne.

Figure 37: Caryn Le Kay, Ma's rendition (2024). Porcelain, glazed tile, photography by Leroy Payne.

Translating these thoughts into my practice I challenge the perception of safety, considering the tension between comforting associations and the visible traces of danger. The floor, the first point of physical contact becomes a form of symbolism. The handmade porcelain tiles of my Ma's kitchen tiles, carefully painting with red floral glaze motifs reflects my perception of a safe space that also simultaneously bears the subtle markers of discomfort (Figures 35-37). While the original kitchen tiles illustrates the visible traces of damage (Figure 34).

Closing Chapter One, I engage with the small yet significant aspects of site specific spaces. The cracks in the surface mirror fragility, vulnerability, and the instability of what we call "safe." In navigating my practice, I reflect on the tension between familiarity and comfort alongside, the potential for violence. This exploration foregrounds the complex relationship between female fear and space. An environment, often perceived as a safe space, can slip into a site where discomfort rises and the potential of violence and vulnerability coexists. Focusing on the surfaces walked upon, I reveal how fear infuses familiar spaces into arenas of uncertainty. This reflects and shapes not only how we inhabit a space, but to a greater text how my practice reconsiders space as a living, breathing entity where the boundaries between safety and threat are negotiated.

CHAPTER 2: MATERIALITY AND TEXT

Cotton strings crocheted and arranged in a pattern
Tracing the floor's veins
Mimicking the gentle flow of lines and cracks
Tracing an incident once present

Once rigid tiles and pavers, now all fragile
A textured surface becomes smooth
A path of memories where footsteps bind
Inviting all who tread to pause and reflect

A six-word text goes viral:
"Text me when you get home"
The location pin is shared now for activation
Three dots pending

- Caryn Le Kay

2.1 Materiality

> *Materiality is something that neither a scientist, curator, anthropologist or any human being can escape, we are ultimately confronted with it on a daily, continuous basis*
>
> Sander Hinzten (2019)

Materiality is not simply what surrounds us, it is something we encounter, sense and feel. It shapes our perception, experience and the sensation we feel as humans. As Sander Hinzten (2019) explains in *Making Material Matter* (2019), materiality is inescapable, as we are confronted with it continuously. It shapes our perception and informs our experiences as humans (Hinzten 2019). We feel it when we gently trail our fingers across a rough stone wall, or sink into a soft couch (Hinzten 2019). Materiality does not only surround us as humans, it forms a conversation that informs how we process both textural and visual information (Hinzten 2019). Although subtle, this confrontation is etched into the way we move and sense the spaces we occupy (Hinzten 2019).

As someone who enjoys storytelling, I find myself when bored, drawn to a mark or crack on a surface, creating little stories about how that visible mark came to be. This silly game felt like a quiet conversation between myself and the surface itself, where curiosity and boredom took the lead. In retrospect, I have come to understand how these embodied interactions with materiality have shaped my perception of everyday life. Now, older and more attentive, I notice the details of surfaces I sit on, stand on, or lie on. What once were made up stories, now hold the potential for significance. Perhaps the faint crack in the tiled floor was important after all.

Hinzten's (2019) observation resonates deeply with my own embodied experience of the material world. This understanding has both shaped my practice and my perception regarding material traces. What began as playful, make-believe stories born of boredom has taken on a more unsettling undertone, tinted by the constant "what ifs" that come with living in a country where femicide is a grim reality. The fractured surfaces, once seemingly innocent, now bears a sense of foreboding. What was previously deemed a playground for storytelling, has swiftly turned into a site of ominous tension.

In a world where the physical realm is intricately woven into human experiences, materiality holds an undeniable power to shape the atmosphere of the spaces we inhabit. From the textures beneath our fingertips to the colours that surround and stimulate us, these seemingly small details contribute to a space's tangible, almost emotive presence. This observation resonates with Michael Ann Holly's description of materiality in *Notes from the Field: Materiality* (2014), in a segment titled 'The meeting of matter and imagination'. Holly (2014:15) highlights the duality of materiality through the interplay of surface and depth, vision and touch, visibility and invisibility, tangibility and texture. Materiality surpasses the physical essence of 'things' and its inherent properties, affecting us intimately and transcending physical essence to shape how we feel and interact with our environment.

Figure 38: Caryn Le Kay*, Vintage Rug, Noom* (2023). Makhanda, Eastern Cape

Figure 39: *When Surface Become Skin* (2024).Porcelain, glazed impression carpet, photography by Leroy Payne.

Drawn to texture, I remember a specific memory and I chose to create it through hand-made miniature ceramic carpets—glazed red and pink (Figure 39). Although not realistic in representation, the inspiration rose from the colourful and decorative patterned carpet positioned on the entrance floor of the girls' bathroom floor at Noom, a coffee shop I frequent in Makhanda, Eastern Cape (Figure 38). What caught my eye was not the bright colours, but rather the positioning of the carpet. I began questioning how many women had walked on this surface before me and how many will walk on it, after me.

In response to the original carpet's woolen material, I opted against the expected wool, choosing instead lingerie as the textural and fabric element of the 'carpet.' Lingerie materials are delicate in structure, designed to rest softly against the skin of the wearer as an intimate piece of clothing. By rolling lingerie into surface of the wet clay, and abruptly removing it, I was able to capture both an absence and bodily presence, activating a conversation between the material, the surface of the Noom floor, and the trace of a female body suggested by the lingerie. This deliberate gesture evokes a quiet violence, one that contrasts strongly with the softness and delicacy of the lacey lingerie material itself.

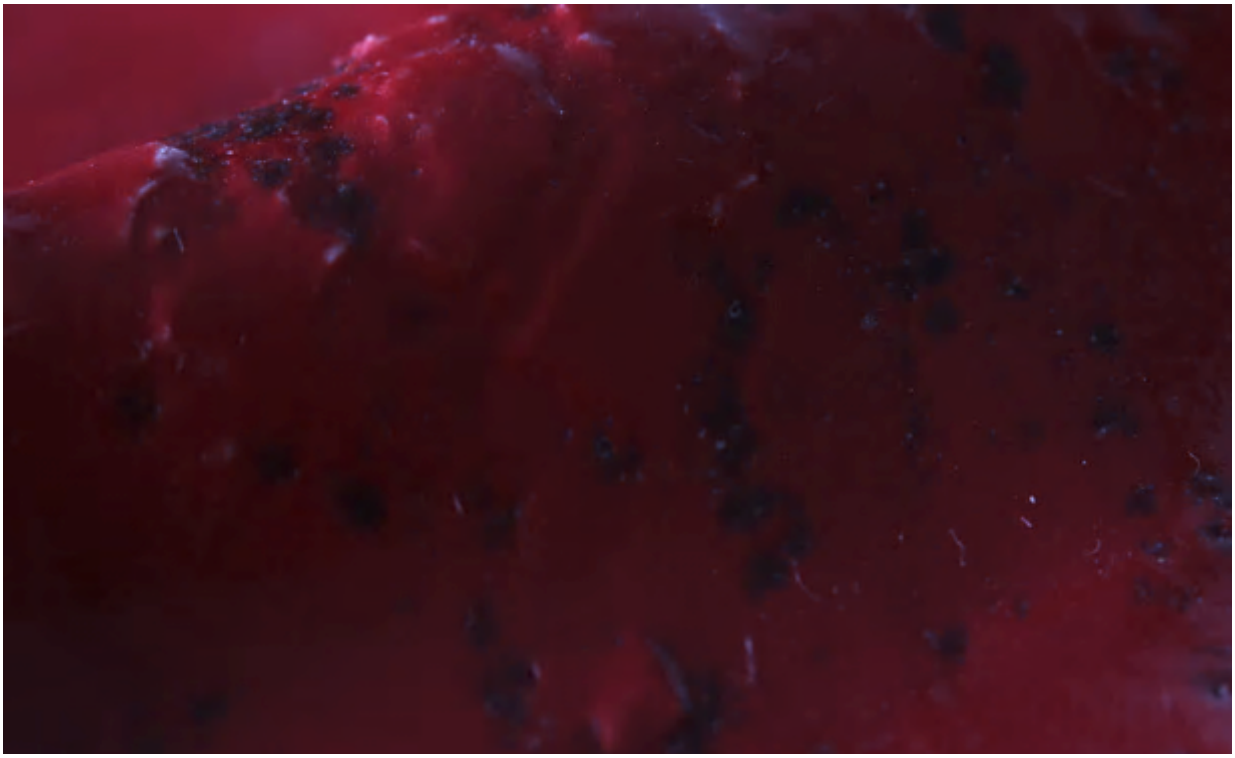

Figure 40: When Surface Become Skin (2024). Porcelain, glazed impression carpet, photography by Leroy Payne.

The repeated gesture described above suggests a subtle yet palpable violence in contrast to the delicate softness of the lace itself (Figure 40). The decorative pattern left behind exclusively from lingerie donated by women, who, for the purpose of this mini-thesis, will remain anonymous. The selected pieces of lingerie worn, torn and marked by continuous use, charges the work with a heightened sense of intimacy and bodily presence, shifting the material language from an object of functionality to one that elicits corporeal memory (Figures 39-42).

The worn lingerie introduces a layered narrative of the wearers' identity, foregrounding a texture and sensory experience as an integral part of my exhibition, followed by the symbolic richness of the anonymity of the wearer. The lingerie carries visible traces of bodily memory through its daily use.

When audience members observe the ceramic carpet; the raised, textured bumps and the visible lace imprinted folds are boldly reflected across the speckled glazed surface (Figure 40). The sensory element is integral here, as I invite the audience to gently drag the palm of their inner-hand across the curved surface, following the contours of the ceramic carpet. The act of trailing

the delicate textures by hand is not a passive gesture, instead it is active, intentionally transforming the trace-material from a wearable item into a skin-like surface presence (Figures 40-41).

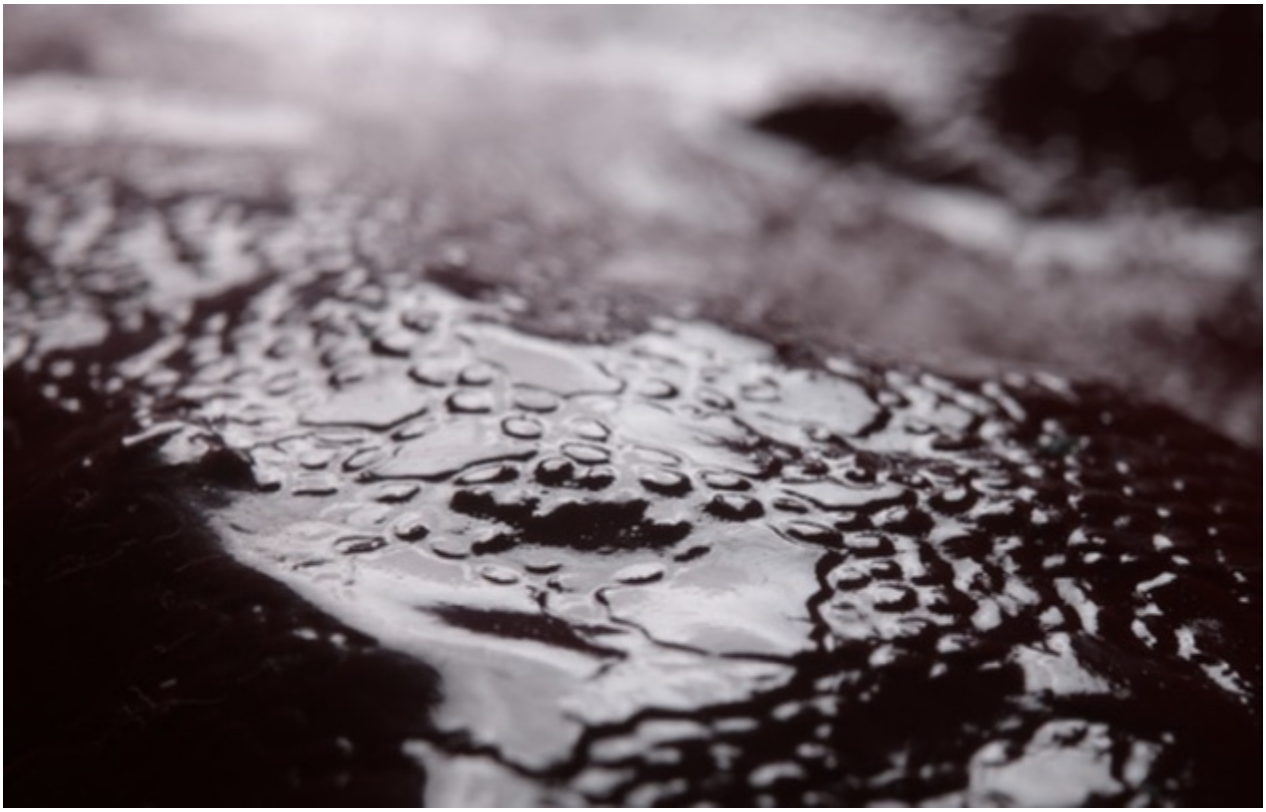

Figure 41: *When Surfaces Become Skin* (2024). Porcelain, glazed impression carpet, photography by Leroy Payne.

Figure 42: *When Surfaces Become Skin* (2024). Porcelain, glazed impression carpet, photography by Leroy Payne.

While underwear is commonly known to intimately surround the female body, remaining smooth and unseen, in my practice, I reimagine it, deliberately through the exposed imprints of the scalloped lace patterns. Apart from the colour, my exploration in materiality, in porcelain, a medium perceived as pristine and refined, takes on a receptive textural skin-like status (Figures 40-42). As Weiwei Shao (2019:1), in the article 'On the surface texture effect of ceramic materials'(2019), points out, "texture refers to the texture structure and texture changes on the surface of the object. It also refers to the subjective perception and experience of texture structure and texture changes. The texture is visible or touchable."

The curved folds and decorative patterns on the ceramic carpet go beyond aesthetic details; eliciting the fine and intimate details of human skin (Figures 40-42). Using the glazed ceramic surface as a metaphor for skin—I recognise that glaze suggests the slight oiliness found on the top layer of living-skin, the organic folds of the warped 'carpet' suggests the folds of human skin, and the raised bumps recall the imagery of goosebumps. These elements I associate with human presence, creating a subtle sense of discomfort, blurring the line between attraction and unease.

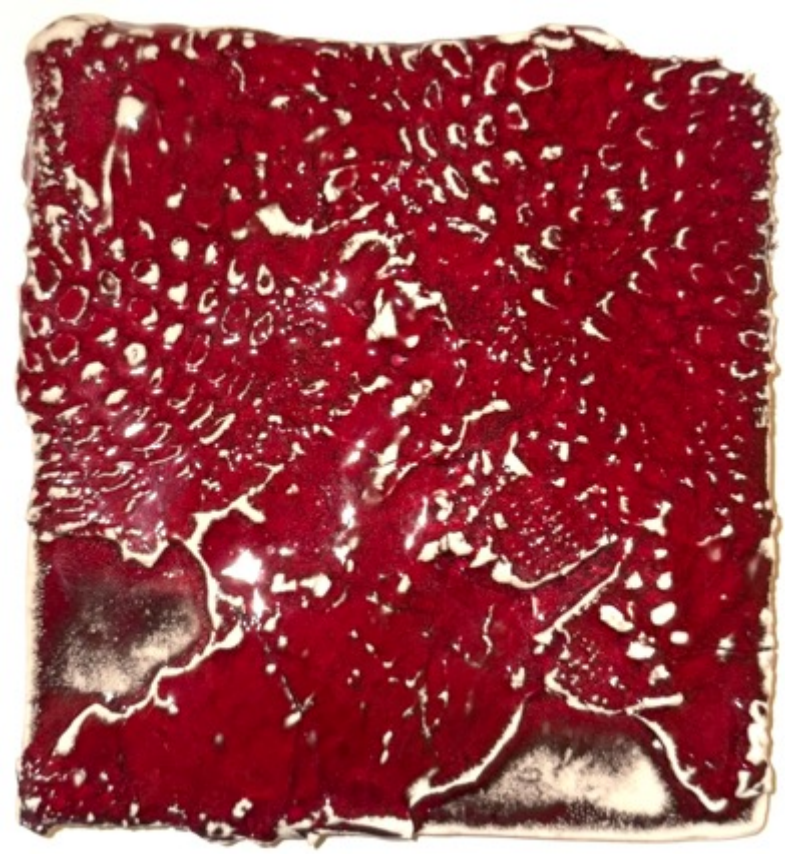

Figure 43:Caryn Le Kay, *The Remnants of Space* (2024). 'Fabric' porcelain tiles, photography by Caryn Le Kay.

Furthermore, through experimentation, porcelain captures physical textures. Using a similar technique to that used on my ceramic carpets, I dip handmade bisque tiles into slip, and while the slip is still wet, drape the lingerie over it. By pressing the fabric with the palm of my hand and then quickly removing it, I leave behind a trace (Figure 43). Through this technique, I embed both an absence and bodily presence, once again initiating a dialogue between the material, the floor surface, and the female body.

Although porcelain is typically perceived as fragile and delicate during the bisque stage[11], with an inherent tendency to break or crack, as it transforms during the stoneware firing process, its material properties strengthen, becoming durable in form.

[11] bisque firing refers to the practice of pre-firing clay to ensure it is impervious to water and an item before it is glazed (Siukola 2021:8)

2.1.1 Process

In my ceramic practice, my ceramics undergo three primary stages of firing, including a drying, bisque-firing and glazing stage. In understanding my approach and process, these stages become fundamental. At first, all clay objects undergo the leather-hard[12] stage and progress towards the bone-dry[13] consistency (Gliozzo 2020:2). In *Firing Ceramics* by George Bickley Remmey Jr, defines the term firing as "the process where ceramic powders and/or clay, which have been compacted, are heated to a temperature where useful properties will be developed." (Remmy Jr 1994:3), As a result, the drying cycle ensures that all ceramic pieces are dry and well-prepared for bisque firing.

The drying process ranges from a day to a couple of weeks, depending on the thickness of the clay, weather conditions, ensuring that moisture is removed— this process is crucial to avoid cracking of ceramics fired in the electric kiln (Gliozzo 2020:2). Bisque-firing is a key step in the firing process, as the clay object goes from its fragile, brittle dry clay state (greenware) to a stone like consistency (ceramic). This firing process roughly lasts between 6 and 10 hours, enabling the clay body to become more stable in structure. The extreme rise in temperature ensures all remaining fluid and moisture is extracted.

In *Ceramics Are More Than Clay Alone* (2003) Paul Borman (2003:147) highlights two internal phases that occurs before the ceramic object cools: sintering and vitrification. In brief, sintering is when the clay particles merge together due to the high temperature of 900 Degrees Celsius, gradually transforming clay into a ceramic object. At this stage the ceramic object remains fragile and can break quite easily (Borman, 2003:149). Following the sintering stage, is the vitrification stage, described as the "sintered stoneware" (Borman, 2003:201). During this phase the clay body is made more durable, able to withstand chemical influences (Borman, 2003:201).

[12] Leather hard is a term used in pottery that forms part of the drying stage process and means that the clay object is firm enough to handle without it changing in shape. However, the clay object is still malleable to some extent for limited alterations.

[13] Bone-dry is a term used in pottery that means that the clay object is fully air-dry and is extremely fragile, ready to be fired.

While cracking remains a possibility as, “the object dries quickly at the surface, causing the surface pores to shrink and almost disappear. As the trapped water subsequently evaporates, cracks are formed because the water is unable to evaporate through the pores” (Bormans, 2003:180). These hidden, internal stages mirror the emotional themes I explore in my practice. Just as clay transitions under high temperatures, so too do the materials I use, for example, the lace underwear also undergoes shifts in meaning, texture and sensory experience. In my body of work, the use of lingerie captures a sensory experience while metonymically suggesting the personal stories of former wearers. This process unfolds across two series: Imprinting on Porcelain (Figures 40-42) and Slip-Dipping on Bisque Tiles (Figure 43).

In the first series, lace underwear is gently draped onto the surface of damp porcelain. Using a wedging board,[14] I roll out a slab of porcelain, using a rolling pin, then gently drape the fabric on the damp surface and began rolling the fabric into the surface of the porcelain, thereby pressing the fabric into the clay and then abruptly removed the material, leaving an imprint behind. The second series employed an experimental technique, which was applied to my hand-made porcelain tiles, that were already bisque fired. Here, I sorted through the underwear bottoms, arranged them in a intentionally haphazardly way across the surface of each tile, before dipping them into the bucket of ceramic slip.[15] Once the slip began to slightly dry on the bisque surface, I quickly and aggressively removed the fabric, leaving a layered and textured imprint that captures the tension between delicacy of the lace undergarments and the physical disruption done by removing the material. Typically, after working with clay, I would cover each of my pieces with a plastic sheet to slow down the drying process and prevent any shrinkage or cracking. However, for this series, I intentionally dismissed the proper firing process, welcoming the surface damage. By not wanting the surface to dry evenly, I exposed the material knowingly, causing cracking and texture to form.

In doing so, I embraced this technique by allowing visual disruptions to become a key factor in my body of work. The repetitive act of shifting between kneading, aggressively slamming and rolling the clay to expel any air bubbles draws attention to the interaction between my

[14] Wedging board I use in my practice is formed from a wooden board covered with canvas that is draped over and stapled into place. This fabric surfaces allow me to roll clay on the canvas board, which helps me draw all the moisture from the clay. This process makes the clay easier to work while also, exceling air bubbles.
[15] In simple form, ceramic slip is a slurry a combination of different solid particles of mineral matter, clay held in suspension with water. It has a thick consistency almost like cream, and used specifically for mould-making.

touch and the responsive qualities of the material. This manipulation of the clay becomes my own form of dialogue with the medium. Delving deeper, I found interest in the history of porcelain itself.

Author and ceramist, Jack Doherty (2002:618-907) proposes that porcelain was found in China during the Tang dynasty. Marking the beginning of whiteware production in the 8th century, Jingdezhen, located in the northeast of Jiangxi province, became one of the earliest centres for porcelain production in southern China (Doherty 2002:10). As much as the origin of porcelain remains historically interesting—peaking my interest further is the composition, particularly kaolin, a vital mineral that gives the material its strength and translucency; fired at temperatures not exceeding 1200 Degrees Celsius (Doherty, 2002:9).

Earthen clay holds the potential to shift between permanence and fragility. Its responsiveness to body heat, minimal pressure, and temperature embodies a connection to human experience, making clay not just a medium, but also an active participant in the creative process. In my body of work materiality is never neutral, it exists as a conversation between the maker (myself), the temperature (time) and the spaces it intends to eventually occupy.

In *Materiality and Meaning* (2021), South African artist and art historian, Alison Kearney (2021:234) defines materiality as an "objects physicality, capacity to carry meaning, and how this meaning can change/alternate in social spaces." In her PhD research, Kearney (2021:234) explores the relationship between materiality and meaning, specifically in relation to found objects. Kearney (2021:234) observes how contemporary artists use found objects as tools of agency. When integrated into artworks, found objects detach from their original function and acquire new meanings as they are recontextualised within the art world (Kearney 2021:234). While my body of work does not entirely consist of found objects I align Kearney's thoughts through one specific series—the porcelain brick paver series, which forms part of my exhibition *The Remnants of Space* (2025).

For this series, I found and captured an original brick paver from the parking lot of my previous apartment block in Makhanda, Eastern Cape[16]. The process went through multiple trial and error stages to transform a structured form into a delicate porcelain object. I began by creating a Body Double[17] mould of the original brick paver, followed by a two-part mould to facilitate the ceramic slip-casting process. After slip-casting, the objects were bisque-fired and then glaze-fired, resulting in fragile porcelain versions of the original brick paver, which I replicated roughly 110 times. Through this transformation, the brick paver shifted from a functional, and durable material to one repositioned and recontextualised as a delicate object, recontextualised to embody a fragile and emotional material presence. This change introduces an inherent tension between sameness and difference.

Through this process, I illustrate the changeability of materiality and highlight how materials become active participants in meaning-making, rather than static agents. For this reason, I engage in the changeable nature of materiality. As Kearney (2021:234) suggests, objects and materials are not passive entities, instead, they interact and reflect the spaces they occupy, constantly acquiring new layers of meaning as they move through different environments and contexts.

Embracing this dynamism, I use familiar surfaces from my surroundings to reveal layered perceptions and convey the idea that meaning is not fixed, but constantly reshaped by experience and spatial context. This conceptual angle informs my approach of material transformation, specifically the shift from sensory to conceptual interpretation. I illustrate this by transforming a, textured surface into a smooth and glossy surface, evoking a sensory shift in materiality. This transformation changes not only the physical qualities of the object but also influences how the audience might view and interact with the work during my exhibition. By inviting an immersive experience through sight and touch, my work repositions overlooked surfaces to become the focal point. This perspective simulates an interpretative and contextual understanding of the significance of materiality within my practice.

[16] Makhana, Eastern Cape formerly known as Grahamstown, is a little town in the Eastern Cape that is known for its academic intuitions such as Rhodes University. The town is historically significant during the Cape Frontier Wars (Heshu 2020).

[17] Body Double is a silicone rubber liquid applied directly to the skin, which cures quickly, reproducing a detailed mirror of the original object. In my practice, I don't apply the mixture to human-skin.

2.2 Between rooms: The importance of story-telling in Igshaan Adams's art

Igshaan Adams's is a South African-based artist whose practice includes performance, weaving, sculpture and installation. Born in Bonteheuwel[18], an informal 'coloured'[19] settlement in Cape Town, South Africa. Adams draws on his personal background to challenge racial, sexual and religious boundaries. This intersectional topography is visible in his practice, serving as a manuscript that traces and rewrites personal histories. A quote from Adams (Blank Projects, 2024) that captures the fundamental qualities of Adams's practice and strongly resonates with my practice approach is: "I'm interested in the personal stories recorded is not necessarily always a factual account but can be what is imagined– a combination of myth-making and meaning-making"

Adams perspective reflects the importance of story-telling in his practice, treating memory not as a static archive of facts instead as an interpretive process. In an article 'Islamic Traditions Meets Post-Apartheid Identity in Igshaan Adams's Intricate Tapestries' (2015), Adams shares in an interview with journalist Emily Rappaport (2015) that domestic environments shaped him, and poses the question: if his environment changed, would the affect remain the same?. This perspective on space, and who enters it—private and public—informs my own practice. It led me to reflect on the contrast between domestic spaces for example my grandparents' home— my personal site of safety and public spaces. These sites on their own are rich in story-telling.

In my practice, I reframe the narrative through my perspective, specifically, through the lens of female fear, vulnerability and the potential of violence. Like Adams, my choice of materials plays an important role in my practice-led research. The repetitive, labour intensive act of hand-making my own floor surfaces, mirrors and blends the emotional weight of fear's cyclical

[18] In the dissertation, *Community Healing in BonteLanga* (2008), Kristin Ankersen (2008:3) states, Bonteheuwel was established in 1965 as a result of the Group Areas Act and is predominately a 'coloured' area.

[19] I place the term 'Coloured' in quotation marks to indicate that, during apartheid, South Africa citizens were racially classified, with 'Coloured' (capitalized C) being an official racial classification defined by the South African government. In Rosemary Ridd's (1994:51) article 'Creating ethnicity in the British Colonial Cape: Coloured and Malay contrasted' she explores this classification, stating that "the category of "Coloured" was created during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries under British colonial" rule, and further asserts that, "Coloured is an apartheid term". Ridd (1994:51) highlights that the use of the term "Coloured" dates back well before 1950 Population Registration Act.

nature. By incorporating lace undergarments, I introduce a sensory presence: delicate and bodily. These gestures become a form of personal documentation. Just as Adams blends myth-making with meaning-making, I use materiality to allow stories to unfold, first through sight, and then through touch.

Reflecting on Adams's practice, in 'Making tracks: The textile Art of Igshaan Adams' (2024), art critic Rosie Lesso (2024) quotes Adams: "I began seeing the floor as a map with marks and evidence of events that took place. I started using my imagination to picture what happened and what the marks meant as a document of experiences of that particular family". Like Adams, my interest in floor surfaces resides in the floor as a site of physical and emotional residue; spaces that reveal traces of past violence and past interactions. In my practice, this conceptual approach informs my choice in material, transforming the floor's surface to form a dialogue, one that ventures beyond aesthetic display.

Drawn to Adams's use of linoleum flooring in his *Vinyl* series (2010), I analyse how he transforms blocks of floor vinyl sourced from members of the community, from various areas of the Cape Flats[20] such as Bonteheuwel and Khayelitsha, into a series of artworks. These surfaces, that were once walked on, skipped on and sat on by many, now serve as a tangible makers of human presence. Notably, the floor is always the first point of contact, a surface that grounds us as we move, gather, and exist in a particular space. Thus, the weathered and aged vinyl floor fragments preserve an almost forensic-like record of human presence, functioning as a *silent witness*.

For my mini-thesis, I have selected three artworks by Adams, two of which were part of an exhibition titled *Have You Seen Him?* on show between August 22, 2013- September 21, 2013. Each of these works explore themes of personal narrative, highlighting the domestic spaces shared by Adams and specific members of the community. Interestingly, the titles of the

[20] In the article *Youths in gangs on the Cape Flats: if not in gangs, then what?* Professor Marichen van der Westhuizen and Mr Sibulelo Gawulayo (2020:118) states: In order to understand gangsterism in this area, one needs to consider the history of the Cape Flats. During the forced removal of families from their homes in the old Cape Town neighbourhoods to the Cape Flats, the sense of community and the dignity of people were deeply affected (Pinnock, 2019). This contributed to a general sense of powerlessness (Bowers Du Toit, 2014; Kahn, 2013). The Cape Flats' history of being a wasteland that was used to forcefully relocate families during the apartheid era has been documented as one of the roots of gangsterism in this area.

selected artworks are in Adams's home language, Afrikaans—a language that is familiar to me, having grown up in a household where my dad spoke English to my sisters and I, while my mum spoke Afrikaans. For example, *Hennie se Kamer* (2010) (Figure 44) translates to "Hennie's bedroom"; *Boeta Joe se Voordeur* (2010) (Figure 45) translates to *"*Boeta Joe's front door*"* or "Boeta Joe's main entrance"; and *Antie se Voorkamer Tapyt* (2010) (Figure 46) translates to "Aunties living room carpet".

Figure 44: Igshaan Adams, *Hennie se kamer tapyt* (2010). Manipulated found floor vinyl, 107 x 135 cm.

In 2013, Adams presented an exhibition titled *Have You Seen Him?,* which featured the artwork *Hennie se kamer tapyt* (2010) (Figure 44), part of his Vinyl series—an installation composed of manipulated, found floor vinyl. The use of linoleum and vinyl flooring, primary materials that were commonly found in 'Coloured' and 'Cape Malay' households, specifically the Cape Flats,' reflects Adams's interest in remembering the histories of his community, especially those embedded within the floor surfaces, worn by many footfalls (Blank Projects, 2024). Writer Jennifer Ball (2015:241), expresses in her article 'Inkblots and their indices:

Rethreading perception in the work of Igshaan Adams' (2015), that Adams's, recalls how residents, rather than removing the weathered flooring, would simply layer new vinyl on top of the existing one.

The act of layering vinyl suggests a cyclical nature of erasure and concealment—where previous worn layers are buried, hidden and now forgotten, as new layers of vinyl overwrite the old. A metaphor in itself. In the article, 'IGSHAAN ADAMS Selected works 2009 – 2015: In conversation with Jennifer Ball' (2017), Ball (2017:24) unpacks the backstory of *Hennie se kamer tapyt* (2010) (Figure 44), recognising the importance of the title in meaning-making. Ball cites Adams (2017:24), who explains:

> I titled the work in reference to where I got it from. So this was Hennie – I think he passed away – and it was important that the titles referred to the spaces that I'd gotten them from because I specifically chose families who had links to my own story. So I was in a way telling my own story through their stories. And the work did feel like a collective narrative. Each piece had a bit of a story when it came together.

The positioning of *Hennie se kamer tapyt* (2010), suggests it was installed on a vertical surface, perhaps a wall (Figure 44). While the gradual fading of patterns from the upper top of the artwork, practically washed with subtle tears and holes, serves as the central component of this work. The stains and accumulated marks coated onto this mat suggest a long and layered history, reflecting the ingrained lives of those who walked many days on it. The use of linoleum floor that has been transformed through human interaction extends Adams's concept of narrating experiences of absence and presence.

The faded and weathered away surface represents the absence and presence of the people who once interacted with this object-of-space. The use of colour gradient in *Hennie se kamer tapyt* (2010) transitions from a fairly dark brown to yellow, drawing the audience's line of sight downward along the installation, The larger scale of a white peeled surface bleeds out across the top section of the 'tapyt', creating a strong visual contrast. From a bird's eye-view, there is a worn, dismantled shoe vamp embedded into the surface of this artwork, that speaks to a remnant of human presence, ultimately a marker of movement that once inhabited this space. Interestingly, the placement of the shoelaces is positioned in the middle of the grout line, suggesting a ghostly shoe, also suggesting a mending of the surface of the floor.

Figure 45:Igshaan Adams, *Boeta Joe se voordeur tapyt* (2010). Manipulated found floor vinyl, 110 x 113 cm.

The artwork titled *Boeta Joe se voordeur tapyt* (2010) (Figure 45) is a fragment of flooring that Adams recovered from the home of his elderly neighbour, a man of Xhosa heritage, known lovingly by the community as, 'Boeta Joe' (Ball 2015:241). Adams was drawn to the piled up layers of vinyl, formed into a palimpsest of vinyl overtime as 'Boeta Joe' repeatedly patched over the surface of the floor with new layers of vinyl. This process led to a build-up, which Adams deliberately removed and repurposed. By engaging with the material, through repurposing, re-laying and reapplying vinyl, Adams transformed this rich biographical object into a canvas, capturing significant moments in Joe's life (Ball 2015). Notable are the subtle interventions, like splatters of yellow paint, faintly blue dyed shoe laces positioned towards the lower left of the vinyl and a hand painted floral motifs on the third row of 'vinyl tile' (Figure 45).

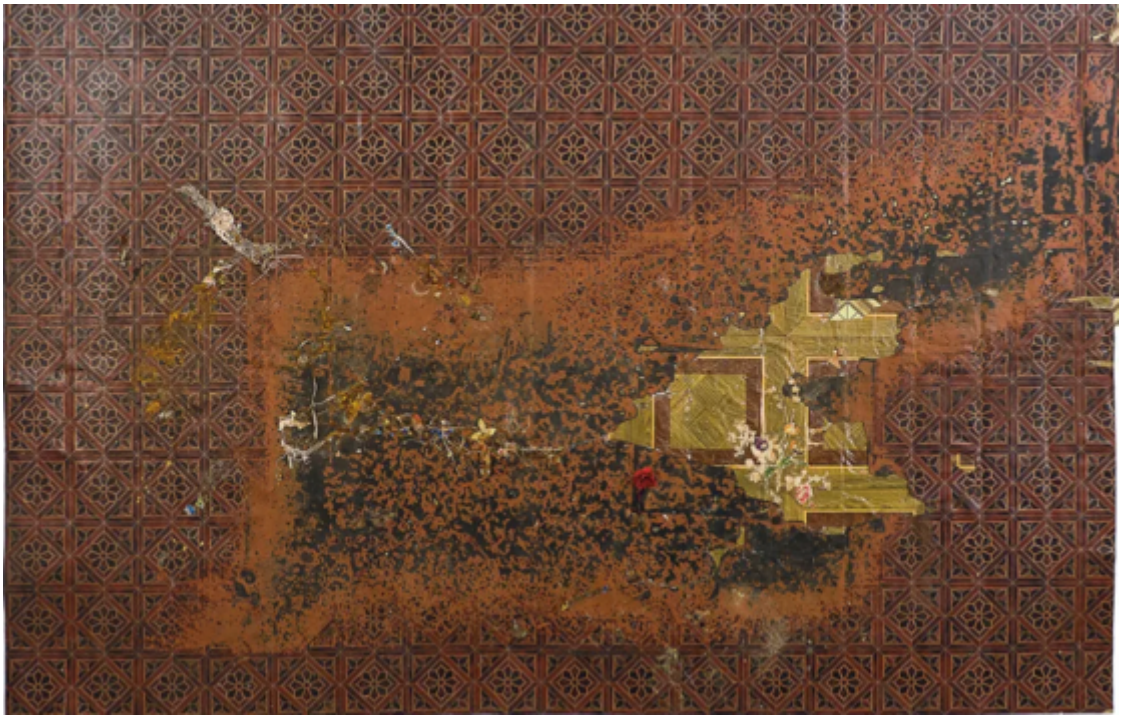

Figure 46: Igshaan Adams, *Antie se voorkamer tapyt* (2010). Vinyl, debris, 71 1/4 x110 1/4.

In addition, *Antie se voorkamer tapyt* (2010) (Figure 46), forms part of Adams's broader vinyl series and is a reflective interpretation of domestic space. The linoleum floor surface becomes a layered, textured surface that dwells between decorative and weathered away, elevating this mundane material into a narrative surface. The square pattern is violently interrupted by an orange and earthy distressed organic brown pattern, shifting focus to the abraded centre, where the initial lattice pattern has worn away, revealing a part of the damaged inner surface—a physical mark exposing the previous vinyl layers.

Rich in materiality, Adams use of vinyl flooring integrates elements of decay, wear and tear, that communicates the passage of time, translating it into a visual narrative. In *Art Africa*, Daniel Hewson (2014) expresses that: "The fragmentation of vinyl flooring symbolises Adams' own interest in his hybrid identity and, by reworking these surfaces, Adams constructs his own interpretation of the story, a response to the narrative depicted before him".

This observation sheds light on the significance of domestic spaces as, 'Hennies bedroom' (2010) (Figure 44) reflects the privacy and intimacy of a space; 'Boeta Joe's front door' (2010) (Figure 45) presents a metaphor for transitional space, controlling who is allowed in and who

is kept out, a liminal space where movement occurs, be it through greetings or goodbyes. In a like manner, 'Aunty's living room carpet', or 'Antie se *voorkamer tapyt*' (2010) (Figure 46) as Adams calls it, operates as a space of gathering and shared remembrance left behind. In this way, Adams embodies this intersection of personal and private interactions by exploring how space and material bear silent witnesses to human presence and the absence of presence, as time progresses.

2.3 Text

> *Text in art mirrors the language of our daily lives, drawings on newspapers, advertisements, and personal stories*
>
> Sarah Feit (2011:1)

In this section, I explore text as both a communicator and a carrier of meaning. My practice engages with two distinct forms of text: first, the physical inscription of the phrase stamped on the back of a tile, bearing both material and symbolic weight; and second, a collection of WhatsApp messages from my female friends and family, forming a digital, conversational archive made entirely up of screenshot 'check-in' text-messages[21]. Together, these texts are an embodiment of a collective and universal experience that many women have and will endure. Their integration is intentional and conceptually layered, forming a dialogue between the physical object and the digital archive.

This approach allows me to reflect on the reality of fearing violence and my gendered experience as a woman in both a visceral and nuanced manner. The stamped phrase located on the back of a single tile, found among stacks of other tiles in the storeroom of Tile Africa[22], speaks to the theme of my practice, bearing an unsettling tone. Similarly, my decision to include text-messages exclusively from women frames my practice within a relatable perspective, creating a parallel between real life and anticipatory fear. Grounding my body of

[21] The terms 'text messaging' or just 'texting' refer to the brief typed messages sent using the SMS ('short message service') of mobile/cell phones, PDAs ('personal digital assistants'), smartphones or web browsers (Thurlow and Poff 2013:1).

[22] Tile Africa is a national supplier of floor coverings in South Africa, they supply porcelain, natural stone tiles, laminate, vinyl and hardwood floors.

work within a South African context arises from my personal fears—fears that loop constantly in my mind, forming an inescapable and weighted reality.

As reflected in *Chapter One*, the fear I carry as a woman is debilitating, and is not mine alone. This reality has become a central impetus for my practice. Integrating both the visual and verbal elements, I make sure that these two modes of expression co-exist, inviting a dialogue between what is seen and that which remains unsaid. Combining the tangible inscription on the tile with the momentary nature of WhatsApp messages, emphasises the manufactory nature of implicit violence, specifically the way it shapes how women move, communicate and exists within any space entered. This conceptual richness aligns seamlessly with contemporary art and the role of interpretation.

While I come to understand contemporary art, as art made in the present, gradually departing from postmodern art, and identified by experimentation and a state of continuous change. Terry E. Smith (2009: 241) in the book *What is Contemporary Art,* observes that "Contemporary art is the institutionalized network through which the art of today presents itself to itself and to its interested audiences all over the world. It is an intense, expansionist, proliferating global subculture, with its own values and discourse; communicative networks; heroes, heroines, and renegades; professional organizations; defining events; meetings and monuments; markets and museums - in sum, distinctive structures of stasis and change."

Similarly, in her Master's thesis *What is contemporary art?* Irina A. Hinkel (2016:2) expresses that, "Today's contemporary art is more diverse, repetitive, and full of contradiction than art at any other time in the history of art. Established genres, media, and styles no longer carry deterministic weight among artists". This trail of thought leads me to consider earlier movements like Cubism and later Conceptual art, both of which challenged traditional ways of representing the world.

In the art journal *Picasso, Cubism, and Reflexivity* Edward F. Fry (1988: 296), explains that "Cubism was the cornerstone of the twentieth-century art because it broke with past traditions definitely; established "modernist" flatness, opticality, and involvement with the medium of art; and thus sanctioned a new tradition that would lead to nonobjective art as well as to assemblage and to other "modernist" principles and practices." At a later stage, Synthetic

Cubism[23] was introduced, integrating text as an integral visual element (Fry, 1998:302). During this movement, artists like Pablo Picasso and George Braque initiated the use of stencil lettering, numbers and newspaper fragments not as decoration, but to disrupt and challenge visual norms, highlighting the materiality of the artwork (Fry, 1998).

By incorporating text in Synthetic Cubism opened the doors for movements like Conceptual art to further critique, challenge and expand traditional notions of art. As Conceptual[24] art practice emerged during the 1960, incorporates the interaction of graphic and grammatical elements of language using shapes and colours in his artwork. Whereas in *Paragraphs on Conceptual Art,* Sol Lewitt (1997:1), expresses that Conceptual art is designed to engage the audience's mind rather than their visual sense or emotions, presenting that the idea or concept at the core of the artwork. In my practice, by including text through screen-shot WhatsApp text-messages and the inscriptions on my porcelain tiles became both a visual strategy and a conceptual tool, blurring the line between text, image and most importantly, meaning.

[23] Rosie Lesso (2022) asserts in *What Is Synthetic Cubism? Here's How to Recognize It* that—Synthetic Cubism is a term commonly used by art historians to describe the second phase of the Cubist movement. Moreover, In contrast, by 1912 Cubist artists began incorporating elements of found materials and collage. The word 'synthetic' was a reference to the incorporation of man-made materials such as newspaper, patterned paper and other textured surfaces (Rosie Lesso, 2022).

[24] Conceptual Art is based on the notion that the essence of art is an idea, and may exist distinct from representation (Osuanyi Quaicoo Essel, Ebenezer Kwabena Acquah, 2016:1217).

Figure 47: Caryn Le Kay, *Made in South Africa* (2024). Porcelain slip-casting industrial tiles and red glaze, photography by Leroy Payne.

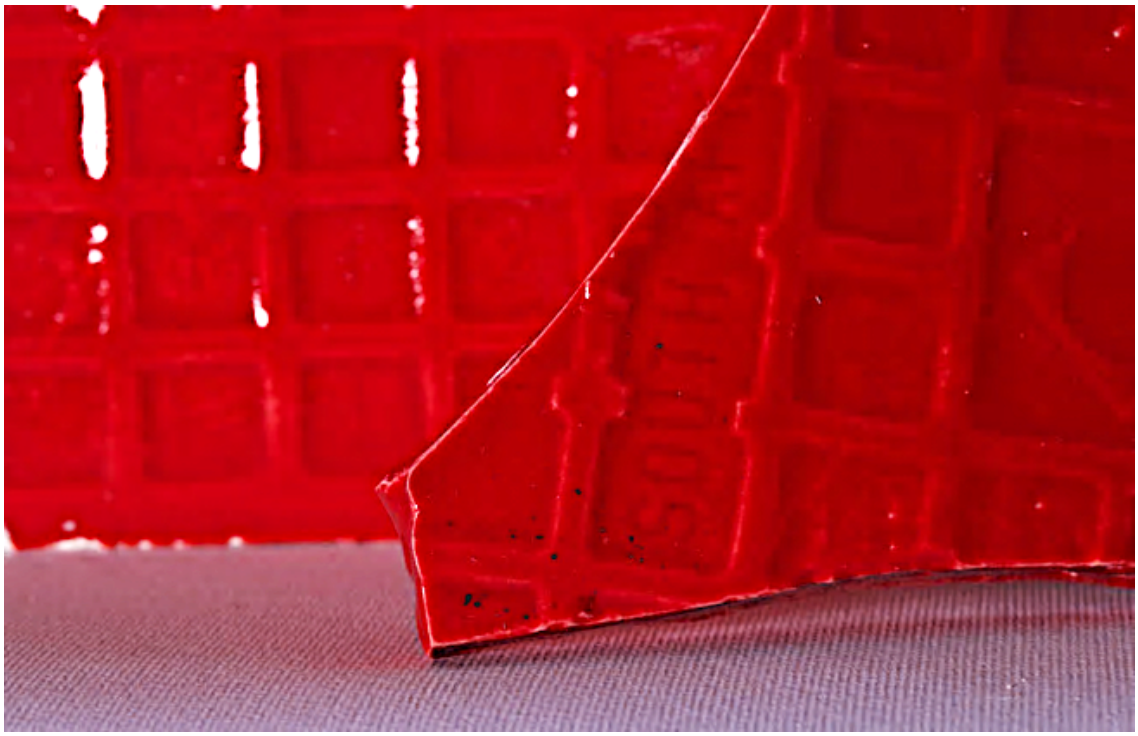

Figure 48: Caryn Le Kay, *Made in South Africa* (2024). Porcelain slip-casting industrial tiles and red glaze, photography by Leroy Payne.

Figure 49: Caryn Le Kay, *Made in South Africa* (2024). Porcelain slip-casting industrial tiles and red glaze, photography by Leroy Payne.

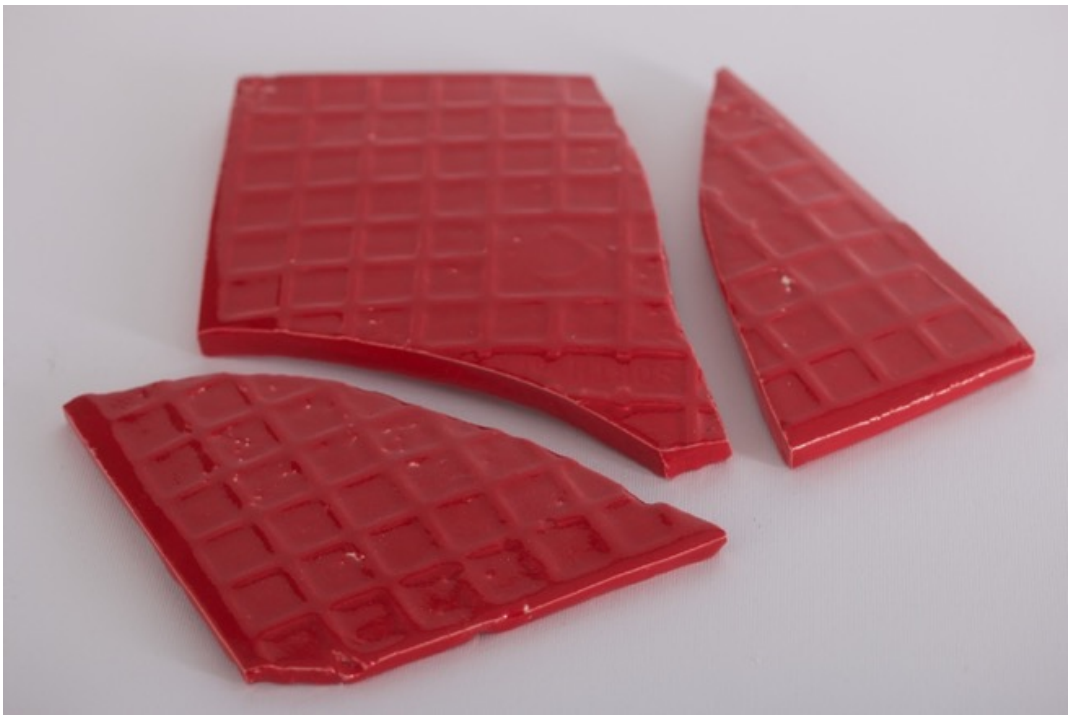

Figure 50: Caryn Le Kay, *Made in South Africa* (2024). Porcelain slip-casting industrial tiles and red glaze, photography by Leroy Payne.

The inscription “Made in South Africa” embedded into the surface of my tiles, at first glance, the phrase may appear as a simple marker of origin, a neutral industrial stamp that place of manufacture (Figures 47-50). Yet, within the context of my work, and in the broader landscape of rising femicide climate in South Africa, its meaning deepens in significance and becomes gravely unsettling.

In ‘Overview of the development of the use of text in the visual arts’ (2021), a journal article by Taiwanese artist, Li Chen (2021:7), the artist expresses appreciation for the inclusivity of text within visual art, suggesting that: “text is no longer an interpretive relationship that guides the description of a work of art but is itself a work of art; words and symbols become part of the work, and art is not only viewed visually but also added to reading and understanding.” In relation to my own practice, by using an original tile with the inscription *“Made in South Africa”* the tile has shifted from being a structural element to one now charged with the process of artistic meaning-making. This is because the original tile has undergone the process of mould-making, acquiring a new significance, where both the text and the material transformation contribute to its status as an artwork.

2.3.1 Personal text message

Building on my fascination with text as both a medium and a conceptual thread in my practice, I explore its integration through personal narratives. The deliberate choice to incorporate text messaging,[25]reflects a familiar practice shared mainly among women, of checking in on one another’s safety, such as “text me when you’re home safe”. By translating these personal exchanges in my work, I highlight the immediacy of vigilance. In this context, I define this habitual act as “checking in”. As time passes, what begins as a friendly digital gesture evolves into an unspoken rule, rooted in a collective need to ensure one’s safety in a world where the potential of violence constantly lurks.

During my time at university, I complied a collection of WhatsApp text messages from close female friends and female family members. These text messages represent care, exchanged

[25] For this mini-thesis and exhibition, I have deliberately chosen to keep the identity of the messengers concealed; although I know each individual who has sent me WhatsApp ‘check-in’ text-messages.

between the messenger and the receiver. Some text-messages read: “Get a cab and let me know when you home safely”; “Someone is knocking at my door. Girl I’m so scared wtf.” Through this display, I emphasise how female fear operates as a shadow presence, subtle but consistent. The anonymity of these messages, now elevated to art shifts the focus from an individual experience to a collective, relatable and shared experience; encouraging the audience to engage directly with the texts themselves, rather than being distracted by the identity of the messenger (Figures 51-54).

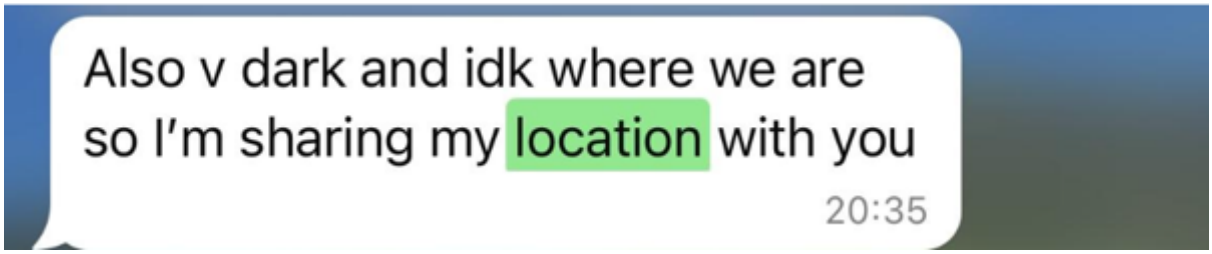

Figure 51: Anonymous (2023). *Also v dark and idk where we are so I'm sharing my location with you*. Sent to anonymous on 8 September 2024.

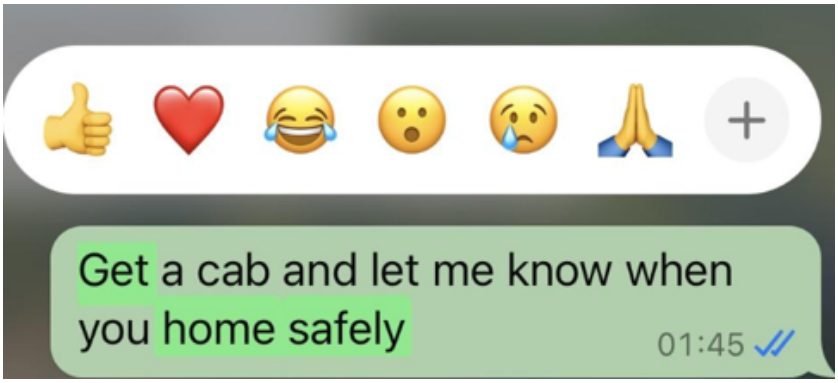

Figure 52: Anonymous (2023). *Get a cab and let me know when you home safely*. Sent to anonymous on 28 April 2023.

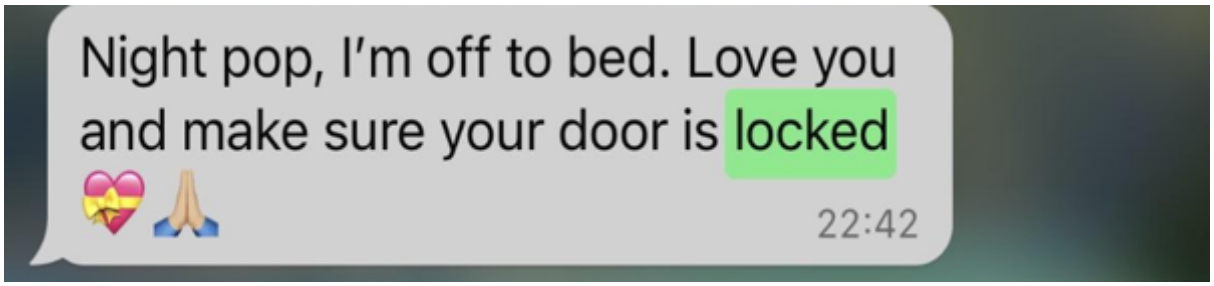

Figure 53: Anonymous (2024). *Night pop* ... Sent to anonymous on 8 September 2024.

Figure 54:Anonymous (2025). *Someone is knocking at my door ...* Sent to anonymous on 6 April 2025.

The collection of WhatsApp text-messages carries emotional significance, serving as a constant reminder that someone is thinking of your safety. While the caring tone of these WhatsApp text-messages are significant, it also highlights the latent unease, tension and quiet recurring notion of female fear amongst a shared sense of caution.

In my exhibition *The Remnants of Space* (2025), a selected chain of WhatsApp text-messages are projected onto one wall, that speaks directly two how women keep in contact with their female friends to ensure they are safe. The iconic WhatsApp time marker intensifies the sense of immediacy, situating each interaction within a temporal and contextual frame (Figures 51–54). The act of 'checking in' is now no longer a passive exchange but is instead fuelled by concern and the desire to sustain a digital connection.

At its core, this collection of WhatsApp text-messages reflects a familiar practice, a habitual practice shared primarily among women who regularly "check in" when vulnerability and the inclination to experience fear intersect. As Peter Phillips (2019:34) in his book, *The Power of Visual Culture and the Fragility of the Text* (2019) proposes that: "textural representation themselves are visual artefacts", further suggesting that the visual aspects of text, such as layout and placement are important in the engagement between text and visual aesthetics, in turn becoming an integral aspect of an artwork's narrative (Phillips 2019:34). By integrating text

within my practice, I form a bridge between visual and verbal elements, making tangible the ways in which written exchanges are perceived, shared and interpreted. In turn, obscuring and blurring the boundaries between what is seen and what is spoken.

2.3.2 Typography and tension: Explored in the works of Sue Williamson and Gabrielle Goliath

In exploring the way in which text functions as both material and meaning in contemporary art, I engage with the practices of two multi-disciplinary South African artists, Sue Williamson and Gabrielle Goliath. While their approach, style and techniques differ significantly from one another, in the selected artworks I chose for this mini-thesis, the use of text is critically and closely integrated into their practice. Each artwork offers a layered reflection illustrating how text translates moves beyond syntax to a tangible and embodied presence that stimulates the audience's both sensorially and conceptually.

Figure 55: Sue Williamson, *Truth Games: Melanie Magmoed –brother shot–Dolf Vermeulen*. (1998) Laminated colour laser print, wood, metal, plastic and Perspex: 84 x 121 x 6cm.

In Williamson's twelve part interactive series, *Truth Games* (1998) she highlights an array of high-profile cases brought before South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)

[26]. Fragmented imagery and text, invites the viewer to confront questions of truth, memory, and erasure (Figure 55) (Goodman 2021). The intention behind using the fragmented quotes from the TRC is to challenge the viewer to reflect on the nature of truth and how it is constructed.

Williamson takes on the role of an editor, sourcing text from newspaper accounts of the TRC hearings, blowing them up with a photocopier, adding colour and incorporating them into moveable Perspex slats, while interrogating historical narratives and collective memory, putting forth a two-part story to develop. The use of moveable Perspex slats, that have specific phrases printed onto them, encourages the viewer to reposition and physically move the text in whichever direction they prefer (Figure 55).

Similarly, in my own practice, the stamped phrase 'Made in South Africa' (Figures 47-50), on the back of replicated ceramic tiles suggests both a literal and symbolic inscription. While, Williamson engages with public archives to explore collective memory and trauma, my body of work engages with how the fear of potential violence manifests in more personal and day to day experiences, particularly within the reality of a high femicide rate country like South Africa. In my practice, text carries both material and conceptual weight: materially, it locates the object within a geographic place of origin; while conceptually, it elicits a sense of unease. Like Williamson's textual approach, this phrase functions as a point of tension between what is captured, recorded and felt, inviting the viewer to analyse how text can hold and transmit layered meanings beyond surface readability.

[26] The TRC (1995-2002) was created by the new democratic parliament to investigate gross human rights violations that were perpetrated during the period of the apartheid regime from 1960 to 1994, including abductions, killings and torture. It brought the victims of apartheid face to face with the perpetrators with the intention to bring closure. The abbreviation TRC stands for Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Gabrielle Goliath, a multidisciplinary artist from Kimberley, South Africa, integrates text in a subtly yet evocative manner in her multisensory installations. Using text to forefront the personal and political dimensions of South Africa's current political landscape, Goliath memorialises and reclaims spaces marked and tainted by trauma. Her practice is one that is deeply reflective and can be seen through the interplay of text and visual elements. Goliath's use of text as a narrative and visual tool in her multi-channel video installation, *Chorus* (2021) (Figure 56-58), curated by Emily Edwards, at Goodman Gallery in Cape Town and the Kochi-Muziris Biennale in Fort Kochi transcends traditional boundaries.

Figure 56: Gabrielle Goliath, *Chorus*, 2021, 2-channel video and sound installation, Goodman Gallery Cape Town. Photos by Hayden Phipps.

Figure 57: Gabrielle Goliath, *Chorus,* 2021, 2-channel video and sound installation, Dallas Contemporary, Dallas (2022/3), Installation views, Photos by Kevin Todora.

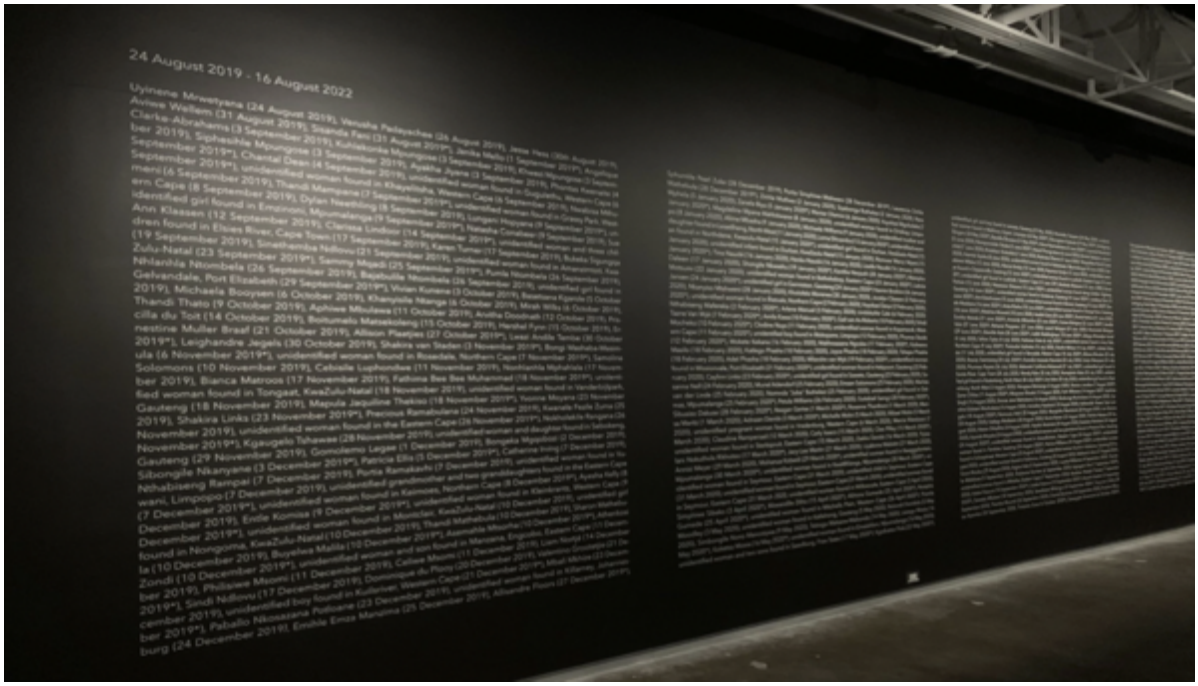

Figure 58: Gabrielle Goliath, *Chorus,* 2021, 2-channel video and sound installation, Kochi-Muziris Biennale, Fort Kochi (2022/3), Installation views, Photos by Swanoop John.

Chorus (2021) (Figures 56–58) is a twenty-three-minute looped, dual-channel video installation, projected onto mirrored, blocked screens to create a durational, multi-channel experience. One video screens depicts a dimly lit, purple-tinted image of an all-female choir

standing on choral risers (Figure 56). Whereas, the opposite dimly purple-lit is an unoccupied choral riser, conjuring an eerie vacancy (Figure 57). The exhibition memorialises lives lost to femicide in South Africa, made evident in the display of 680 names or victims printed onto the gallery wall (Figure 58). Goliath deliberately renders the victims' names in white vinyl lettering on a large scale, as an impactful visual statement, one that demands acknowledgment. In doing so, she repositions the victims' names from statistical data to an embodied presence within the gallery. By recognising names in this way, Goliath demands recognition for each innocent life lost; taking ownership of the narrative and bearing witness to the escalating rate of femicide. The text spans across walls, creating an overwhelming presence, as though the walls themselves are "weeping" with the names of the dead. In this way Goliath also pays tribute to 19-year-old university student Uyinene Mrwetyana[27].

From my perspective, Goliaths choice of colour such as the dark black walls and purple lighting, grounds the installation in themes of mourning and remembering the victims. The projection of the choir on one screen and the empty podium on another screen radiates, a cold white light; contrasting with the black wall and dim purple lighting, thus creating the effect of a haunting presence. The artist's choice to not incorporate vibrant colour amplifies Goliath's theme of loss, absence and pain. The muted colour palette strips the space of distraction, encouraging the audience to shift focus towards the emotional resonance of her work. It also mirrors the trace-based qualities in her work, through the documentation of histories subtly evident.

In own practice, I draw on the installation work *Chorus* (2021) as a conceptual foundation to emphasise the pervasive nature of fear experienced by women. The textual element integrated in my work differ structurally and visually from Goliath's work, both artworks foreground text as an active agent that demands attention. The inscription 'Made in South Africa' serves as a point of departure for my practice, and reflecting the country's high rate of femicide rate,

[27] Uyinene Mrwetyana was a 19-year-old South African student, who was studying at the University of Cape Town. Mrwetyana was raped and tortured to death by Luyanda Botha, who worked at the local police office. The following day after her murder, Botha dumped her remains in an open field, dousing her body with petrol and setting it alight (Goliath 2021). Mrwetyana's murder sparked public outcry: vigils were held, and thousand gathered in protest outside the South African Parliament in Cape Town.

turning the phrase into a trace of vulnerability and embodying the tension between what is seen and what is hidden. The repetitive nature of mould-making in my practice resonates with Gqola's (2021:62) concept of the 'factory' as a metaphor for systemic violence, while Goliath (2021) employs repetition as a means of amplifying presence.

The screenshots of WhatsApp text-messages shown in my mini-thesis are documented as static images. In the exhibition, *The Remnants of Space* (2025), these WhatsApp text messages, complete with the time stamps, are projected onto a wall, highlighting the unsettling routine of being female in South Africa. Providing 'evidence' that reveals how women monitor their vulnerability across public and private spaces. Reflecting upon Goliath's installation *Chorus* (2021), I am reminded of the 680 victims whose lives were lost. These women likely received similar messages, that went unread at the time of their assaults and deaths. In this context, the screen-shot messages serve as intimate yet shared expressions of female fear and a memento mori. Both my body of work and Goliath's practice disrupt the boundaries between representation and reality, demanding that viewers confront the collective female fear of femicide that shapes women's everyday experiences in South Africa.

In Chapter Two, I critically analyse materiality, my process techniques, as well as the conceptual approaches within my practice, fixing on porcelain as a metaphor for fragility and transformation. Through experimental methods like mould-making and slip-casting, I place emphasis on floor surfaces and their textures by transforming their original structural qualities into delicate porcelain forms, preserving the ephemeral traces and sensory experiences of these spaces. Moreover, this chapter explores the nature of text and storytelling within my practice, allowing personal narratives to surface. Drawing from a personal archive of WhatsApp messages, I reflect on how these digital fragments foreground the practice of 'checking in', evolved from a friendly gesture to an unspoken rule. Presenting these text-messages anonymously re-directs the audiences focus from individual identities to shared, relatable reflections. In essence, Chapter Two is a detailed exploration of the forms and notions that underpin my practice; and the artists who have influenced my artistic development.

CHAPTER 3: TRACES

A stained and cracked surface reflects
In corners where dust settles
Telling old tales

Once soft patterns laid
A carpet, its fibres frayed
An aisle for memories

A walk upon the pavement's skin
Collects remnants from the earth
All left imprinted on wet clay

- Caryn Le Kay

3.1 Traces

> *The trace is not a presence but rather the simulacrum of a presence that dislocates, displaces and refers beyond itself.*
>
> Jacques Derrida (1973:156)

The concept of traces has always been of interest to me, particularly the subtle marks left behind on surfaces, quiet disruptions that hint at past events beyond immediate perception. A hairline crack running through the centre of a tile or a chipped corner worn by time, all silent storytellers revealing the passage of time and the intangible remembering concealed within the skin of the floor surface. This concept occupies my thoughts, especially when I think of the cement-paved parking lots outside a grocery store, the carpeted surfaces of class rooms, or the tiles surfaces of rental apartments. These surfaces, so familiar and constantly occupied by foot-traffic lead me to wonder how many women have left their traces over time.

This curiosity heightens my awareness of the subtle imprints and residual marks that accumulate on these surfaces, suggesting a prior presence and lived experience that is rarely acknowledged. As even faint traces convey layered traces of activity within the space itself, silently holds onto the memory of those who once occupied it, even when they're no longer there. This notion of traces, both seen and unseen, draws my attention to the book *Scene of the Crime* (1997) by American curator and author Ralph Rugoff.

In this book, Rugoff (1997:24) observes how traces of past events and actions are grounded in both art and the physical world. Furthermore he examines how art can serve as a form of investigation, where works of art, specifically conceptual art, be it photographs, sculptures, or installations, become the "scene of the crime," allowing the viewers to access hidden histories and stories. Rugoff's approach is akin to piecing together fragments of a larger narrative, however the only difference is that he invites the public to assist in the act of uncovering these greater hidden details.

By engaging with these multifaceted histories, the viewer actively participants in reconstructing stories that may have been intentionally or unknowingly erased, revealing

overlooked truths. This act explores the unseen connections and records between people and the spaces they inhabit.

In addition, the book's title *Scene of the Crime* acts as a compelling metaphor for revealing the residual marks and hidden traces of both past and present. This notion is further highlighted by Walter Benjamin's observation, (cited in Rugoff 1997:75), that "to live means to leave traces". This notion encapsulates Rugoff's concept and similarly echoes a central theme in my practice. Rugoff's (1997) concept draws attention to the realisation that every object and environment bears traces of human activity and interactions, offering insight into how materiality and space reflect past actions. His thinking not only deepens my understanding and perspective on the interplay between space, objects, and materiality, but has also contributed to my approach to art making.

By connection this perspective to the broader notion of artistic practice or specifically conceptual art, Rugoff (1997:62) argues that: "[S]uch art insists that 'content is something that can't be seen'... it requires that the viewer arrive at an interpretation by examining traces and marks and reading them as clues. In addition, it is marked by a strong sense of aftermath .... Taken as a whole, this art puts us in a position akin to that of [the] forensic anthropologist or scientist, forcing us to speculatively piece together histories that remain largely invisible to the eye".

Through this statement, Rugoff suggests that certain art forms require the viewer to engage deeply with what is not immediately visible, the emphasis being placed on 'not'. Once found, these traces serve as clues, allowing the viewer to interpret the pieced together hidden histories. This approach is similar to that of a forensic investigator, tasked with uncovering stories and meanings that are not immediately apparent, turning the artmaking into a process of discovery. While it may be similar, Rugoff positions his skills and artistic knowledge as a curator, and applies this approach from a forensic aesthetic perspective. Thus, in *Scene of the Crime* (1997) Rugoff (1997:62) defines the term forensic aesthetics as: "Inextricably linked to an unseen history, this type of art embodies a fractured relationship to time. Like a piece of evidence, its present appearance is haunted by an indeterminate past, which we confront in the alienated form of fossilized and fragmented remnants".

Building on the discussion of trace in relation to art and serving as a tool to explore absence and presence, I refer to French philosopher Jaccques Derrida's thoughts on the trace in *Speech and Phenomena and Other Essay on Husserl's Theory of Signs* (1973). According to Derrida (1973:51), the trace is "not a presence but the simulacrum of a presence that dislocates, displaces, and refers beyond itself. The trace does not appear as such. It is the erasure of selfhood, of death itself, inscribed in the form of presence".

This passage reflects Derrida's (1973:51) concept of the trace, which highlights that it is not a direct presence but rather a "sign of something". Derrida's (1973:151) idea of the trace is key to an understanding of how meaning is constituted not only in presence, but in what is absent, in what has already been. As we know, the trace by its very nature, operates as a maker of something that has been lost, displaced, or forgotten, yet it also reflects this lost presence through its absence. As a result, Derrida highlights how absence is never truly absent, but is rather a part of what shapes our perception of presence. In turn, the trace disrupts binary oppositions, such as presence versus absence. This perspective shows the viewer that the lines between presence and absence are not as fixed as one may think. The nature of these categories is typically blurred, but what remains important is that the central message of Derrida's (1997) analysis on the trace is that what is left behind is important too.

This disruption makes the concept of the trace particularly significant within feminist theory. Feminist theorist such as Griselda Pollock and bell hooks have long critiqued the ways in which women's histories and experiences are erased within dominant discourses. Derrida's notion of the trace, emphasises what is absent or erased, establishing an important framework for uncovering hidden histories that have been overlooked or intentionally silenced. It also offers an exploration on how the lived experiences of women, although often silenced or overlooked, These traces, although not always visible, leave subtle yet persistent marks on the spaces they inhabit. These marks, although not always visible to the naked eye, continue to shape and challenge dominant spheres. In this sense, the trace is a key tool for feminist theorists, offering a way to reclaim these overlooked narratives.

Incorporating Derrida's (1973:51) concept of the trace into my mini-thesis, has led me to emphasise that which is absent. Moreover, the trace, in this sense, highlights both the visible

and often overlooked elements of an experience, drawing attention to what has been displaced, overlooked or, potentially erased (Derrida, 1997).

Furthermore, through physical elements, art invites the viewer to explore both the immediate and visible qualities of the presence or absence and often, if not always, the unseen meanings begin to emerge. As discussed earlier, these layers can be deemed as traces and may include evidence of past actions or ideas that are not directly observable by the naked eye. When an investigation takes place, hidden meanings or elements begin to emerge. In this way, art transcends its physical form, encouraging a deeper engagement with its material presence, its immaterial presence, or conceptual presence. As this chapter is concerned with the notion of trace, I analyse South African artist Kathryn Smith's series, *In Camera* (2009), which is concerned with the notion of forensic aesthetics.

3. 2 Between the visible and the invisible: Traces and forensic aesthetics in Kathryn Smith's practice

Kathryn Smith, born in Durban, South Africa, is an interdisciplinary visual artist and curator who specialises in forensic facial identification and depiction. She works across a wide range of imaging technologies and investigative practices, applying nearly twenty-years of experience in the following fields: studio production, exhibition and publication, tertiary education, public art administration, and research. Recognised in many fields of practice, Smith is primarily noted for blending the fields of art and forensic science with specific focus on forensic facial imaging which involves her using scientific techniques to recreate faces from skeletal remains.

In an online interview conducted with Kathryn Smith on 5 July 2024, I gained critical knowledge of her practice with particular emphasis on her first *In Camera* series realised in 2007 and exhibited in Johannesburg, South Africa. In this sub-section, I engage with key themes in Smith's practice, including: traces, forensic aesthetics, visibility and invisibility.

Her inspiration for *In Camera* (2007) came from her move from Johannesburg to Cape Town, South Africa (Smith and Le Kay 2024). Living in a new city came with a new set of surroundings that she had to familiarise herself with (Smith and Le Kay 2024), drawing

attention to the extreme difference in violence that she experienced, read about, and heard about. In the course of the interview, she highlighted that, “if you don’t treat the dead with any respect, how do you treat the living?” (Smith and Le Kay 2024). This statement struck me, not only as a reflection on the society we live in, but also as an impactful commentary on the way women and young girls are treated in South Africa. The absence of respect and justice for those who suffer violence is a clear reflection of how deeply entrenched these dynamics are in society. This statement is prevalent in understand the experiences of women, particularly in the context of Gender-based Violence. By highlighting the absence of respect for the living, especially for women who face violence, I refer back to Derrida’s (1973:51) concept of the trace. The “trace” in this context is not just a mark left behind, it is the absence of recognition, the failure to confront the pain that remains long after the event itself. These traces do not disappear; they persist in the form of collective memory and in the stories left untold.

Figure 59: Kathryn Smith, *In Camera* (2007). Installation view dimensions variable.

Figure 60: Kathryn Smith, *In Camera* (2007). Installation view with ultraviolet light on. Dimensions variable.

The series, *In Camera* (2007) (Figures 59-60), is an artwork that explores the boundaries between visibility and invisibility, a theme that aligns with the forensic aesthetic of capturing traces that are not immediately apparent or easy to identify. In this artwork (Figures 59-60) Smith uses invisible UV-sensitive inks in her portraits, which are only visible under certain light conditions, drawing attention to the idea that what is seen in the work is only a partial revelation, correlating with the idea of traces; with great emphasis placed on the notion of presence as well as the absence that lingers beyond immediate perception.

The visible and invisible also reflects the way the artist addresses violence and trauma in her body of work, specifically in the ways in which victims' experiences remain largely invisible or misunderstood in mainstream narratives. In the series, *In Camera* (2007) (Figures 59-60), she examines the fact that violent histories and the individuals involved in them often remain elusive, leaving only partial or fractured traces, much like the way forensic aesthetics functions in real-world investigations. These traces, though often hidden, hold critical significance in reconstructing a broader understanding of the trauma, history, and violence that defines this artist's oeuvre. Smith's artworks reveals traces of past violence that exist in an in-between space, neither fully visible nor completely invisible. This exploration of what can and cannot

be seen aligns with forensic practices. By this, I refer to the uncovering of hidden truths, using both the visible remnants of an event and the unseen forces.

In the series, *In Camera* (2007) (Figures 59-60), Smith delves into themes of violence, victimhood, and the erasure of human experience. During our interview she stated that the phrase "in camera" means 'in private or 'in secret,' in legal contexts to describe testimonies given behind closed doors, such as those of victims of sexual assault (Smith and Le Kay 2024). This concept underpins the series' exploration of how certain violent acts are often difficult to fully understand due to their intensity; further explaining that the images in the series are of victims and perpetrators.

Smith's use of an ultraviolent light draws attention to the concept of the trace, something fleeting and intangible, yet significant. In addition to the portraits, is the immersive installation with audio and lighting elements, allowing Smith to engage with the spectral nature of trauma and violence. By using these techniques, Smith creates a space where the viewer confronts the ghosts of violent histories that remain elusive, just beyond grasp, reflecting the difficulty of truly understanding or processing these events. Incorporating both forensic and artistic approaches, Smith's work pushes the boundaries of how violence and its aftermath are represented, reclaiming those moments that escape cognitive or emotional retention.

Furthermore, the concept of forensic aesthetics also informs her exploration of how images and representations of violence become abstracted over time. In this sense, the traces she leaves behind in her work, often invisible to the naked eye and only revealed through the deliberate and controlled use of ultraviolet light, resonate with the elusive traces left by traumatic events—the marks that remain present but undetected unless actively investigated. Her interdisciplinary approach, integrating visual art with forensic practices, highlights the way in which power, memory, and representation intersect, drawing attention to the experiences that might otherwise remain erased or forgotten.

3.3 Remnants of space: Integrating traces and forensic aesthetics in my practice

The core theme of my artistic practice is rooted in the concept of traces and forensic aesthetics, where the process itself is an integral part of the work. My art is not only about the final form, but about the journey, the manipulation of materials, the shaping of absence and presence, and the transformation of everyday objects into works of art. Collectively, these elements speak to the ideas of fragility of human presence, the residue we leave behind, and the ongoing interaction between public and private spaces.

One of the key materials I work with is porcelain, a medium associated with its fragility but also known for its durability. In my practice, I do not simply rely on its smoothness and whiteness as an aesthetic choice. Instead, I am interested in its mailability, its transformability, how porcelain can embody traces of other materials and the spaces they have inhabited. For me, working with porcelain is both a physical and conceptual act. It is the transformation of one material into another, the delicate balance between absence and presence, and the act of preserving the trace of something that is no longer present.

This understanding has shaped my personal interpretation of what defines a trace. Grounded in my background of sculpture, I consider mould-making and casting as prevalent forms of trace-making. These techniques enable me to engage with subtle surface residues, cracks and imprints found on the following surfaces: *Cement Floors* (Figures 14-21), *Porcelain Brick Pavers* (Figures 23-25), *Ma's Rendition Floor Tiles* (Figures 35-37), *Ceramic Porcelain Carpets* (Figures 39-42), and *Made in South Africa* floor tiles (Figures 47-50). Drawn to the idea that mould-making can preserve and capture the most subtle impressions and quiet marks left behind by prior interactions.

Here, the mould becomes a tool, functioning as a vessel that materially captures the remnants of a surface space. By casting both liquid porcelain and porcelain clay into my moulds, I experimented with three techniques to capture a trace: slip-casting, silicon relief mould and plaster of paris relief mould. I focused on two types of objects, brick pavers and tiles, surfaces I regard to be the most walked upon. Through mould-making techniques involving a silicon rubber mould material called Body Double, which I regard to be the best material for my

practice, I transform the physical disruptions into tangible forms, as shown in my exhibition *The Remnants of Space* (2025).

The repetitive nature of mould-making in my practice resonates with Gqola's (2021:65) concept of the 'factory' as a metaphor for systemic violence. These materials enable me to preserve what I think of as the 'skin' layer of the floor surface, capturing its residue and texture, retaining the subtle evidence of past traces of contact, both metaphorically and physically. This ranges from the process of my porcelain ceramic bricks, *Made in South Africa* tiles, to my own handmade tiles. Here, I consider the surface as a deeply loaded facet when considering the literal trace that is embedded into the moulds. To further unpack my personal interpretation of a trace, I use the following steps:

3.3.1 Capturing the trace: Brick pavers

As each brick paver carries within it the quiet histories of countless footsteps and residues, I find it important to focus on retaining the trace of the object through mould-making. As a result, the process begins by coat the brick paver with a mixture of water and soap to prevent sticking during the moulding process. I then use an empty plaster container, which I line bottom and sides with clay, embedding my brick paver into the clay before pouring over the Body Double silicon rubber mixture. Here, the silicon liquid wraps around the brick paver, acting as a layer of skin, capturing the finest and subtle details of the object, as the silicon mould begins to set.

Figure 61: Caryn Le Kay, *The Remnants of Space* (2025). Porcelain slip-casting brick pavers, photography by Leroy Payne.

Figure 62: Caryn Le Kay, *The Remnants of Space* (2025). Porcelain slip-casting brick pavers, photography by Leroy Payne.

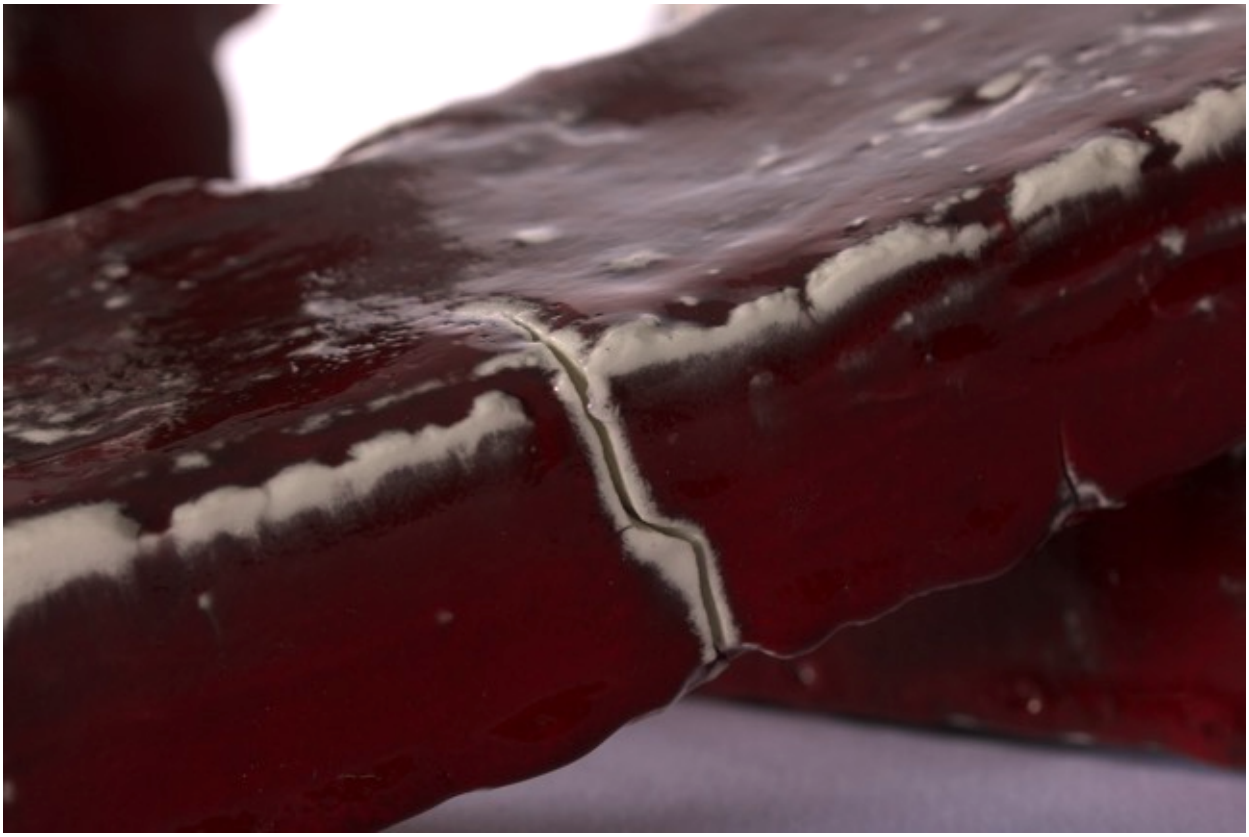

Figure 63: Caryn Le Kay, *The Remnants of Space* (2025). Porcelain slip-casting brick pavers, photography by Leroy Payne.

As the silicon mould cures, it preserves every visual disruptions such as cracks, chips and holes (Figures 61-63). Once fully set, I carefully remove the brick paver, leaving behind a negative mould: a hollow interior trace of the original brick paver. In the absence of the physical brick, I pour in a second silicon mixture, that flows into every crevice and recess of the interior of the mould. Once cured and the silicon casting has been completed, a two-part mould[28] is constructed, which allows for slip-casting. The porcelain slip conforms to the shape of the mould and hardens as it sets, gradually forming a solid cast.

Once the slip-casting is complete, I am able to open the mould and remove the porcelain brick to be prepared for bisque firing. Finally, once the object is bisque fired, glazed and fired again to complete the transformation of the original paver into this *phantom* porcelain paver. A fragile porcelain replica of the original hardy surface is made. This process is incredibly significant.

[28] A two-part mould is created by combining two separate sections to form a single cavity for casting. In my practice, I used this technique to mould a brick, and thereafter, I cast the form in porcelain slip.

It allows me to transfer the exact imprint of the brick paver, an object that, in itself, carries connotations of functionality but also potential violence as a makeshift weapon. Every intricate trace, crack and imperfections is captured into a fragile material like porcelain. Playing with the idea of absence and presence in my practice. The brick itself, the original object, is no longer part of the piece; it is replaced by a porcelain replica, carrying with it the exact shape and texture of the original. The concept of absence: something that was once present but is now only implied forms an interesting idea. The traces left behind are now embedded in the porcelain, yet the physical presence of the brick is absent. The transformation from a raw, functional material like a brick to a delicate porcelain object is also a meditation on the fragility of presence.

3.3.2 Capturing the trace: ‘Made in South Africa’ tile

Figure 64: Caryn Le Kay, *Made in South Africa* (2024). Porcelain tile, photography by Leroy Payne.

The process of capturing the ‘Made in South Africa’ inscription began by locating a tile with the phrase stamped on the back of it, a quiet marker of place, framing the overall theme of my body of practice (Figure 64). I coated the tile in a mixture of soap and water to prevent adhesion during mould-making, and by building a wooden frame (four walls and a base) and lining the

interior with clay, I placed the non-text face down, embedding it into the clay. Thereafter, I poured a Plaster of Paris mixture over the tile, allowing the mixture to settle and record the delicate details of the stamped lettering.

As the curing time passed, I carefully removed the tile, leaving behind a trace of the written text. To complete the process, I first allowed the clay object to dry, thereafter a bisque firing followed and finally a glaze firing. A replica created, preserving the trace of the original tile, and capturing the details of each tile grid block and inscription (Figure 64). In so doing, I intentionally shift an industrial marking into a metaphysical symbol that communicates the origin of my female fear and the high femicide statistics.

3.3.3 Capturing the trace: ‘Fabric’ porcelain tiles

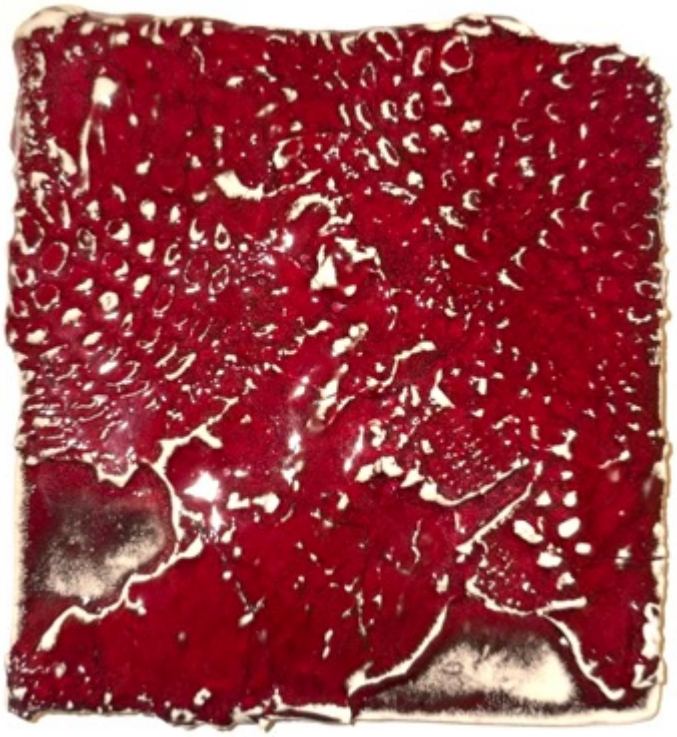

Figure 65: Caryn Le Kay, *The Remnants of Space* (2025). 'Fabric' porcelain tiles, photography by Leroy Payne.

In contrast to the found surfaces, for example: my brick pavers and industrial tiles, while the ‘fabric’ porcelain tiles speak for themselves. This series captures an intimate trace of human presence, lingerie to be specific (Figure 65). By transforming an intimate, bodily item into a physical object, I call forth its absence; and the trace alone functions as a forensic residue. Quiet in its material presence yet loud in metaphorical weight, the ‘fabric’ porcelain tiles

expose a material that is deeply private, now made public. That in itself leaves room for questions. In this context, the trace operates as a “clue,” inviting viewers to interrogate what has happened and what remains hidden, as the absent body and the fragile trace simultaneously creates tension between presence and disappearance. This void compels the viewer to question who was here, what happened, and why only the trace remains. This series positions the viewer as witness, asking them to reconstruct the narrative from this delicate evidence. In this way I reflect on Rugoff’s concept highlights how absence itself holds great significance.

3.3.4 Capturing the trace: Cement floor surface

Figure 66: *The Remnants of Space* (2025). 'Cement floor surface', porcelain-bisque fired, photography by Leroy Payne.

Figure 67: *The Remnants of Space* (2025), 'Cement floor surface', porcelain bisque-fired, photography by Leroy Payne.

In addition to my handmade tiles, another way I engage with traces and forensic aesthetics is through the use of the cement floor (Figures 66-67). In this series, I chose a surface that already has a lot of texture and character. By rolling a slab of porcelain clay onto the worn cement floor surface the porcelain adheres to the surface, picking up all the subtleties of the underlying dirt and texture. Once the porcelain has set, I carefully peel it away from the surface, leaving behind the trace of the cement floor that was beneath it.

The act of peeling the porcelain away is a critical moment in the process. It is an unveiling of a trace left behind by the found surface. What remains is not a just a piece of porcelain. It is now a physical manifestation of absence. The original surface is no longer present in its original form, but the trace, the imprint of the space it inhabited, remains embedded in the porcelain itself. The porcelain, with its smooth surface, shifts, becoming a vehicle for memory, a way of preserving the unseen.

In each of my series I engage with the concept of forensic aesthetics, the idea that objects, through their traces, hold evidence of past actions, histories, and interactions. The residue whether physically or conceptually, left on these objects tells a story, one that is not immediately visible but can be uncovered through careful examination and manipulation. The process of transforming these objects whether through mould-making, casting, impressions-made becomes a way of bringing these traces to the surface, making the unseen visible.

The forensic aspect of my practice is not about finding definitive answers or creating a certain narrative; rather, it is about the act of uncovering and revealing. It is about exploring the relationship between absence and presence, between the material and the immaterial. In this sense, the objects themselves become carries. Through the use of materials like porcelain, bricks, and tiles, I engage with the concept of space in a personal way. Materials, often found in private and public spaces, hold the traces of prior human interaction, as well as suggesting future presence. By transforming these objects into fragile porcelain replicas, I create a space for reflection on how these traces, these residues, shape our understanding of the spaces we inhabit. The act of transformation becomes a way of questioning the notion of a "safe space," particularly in the context of gender-based violence.

To conclude Chapter Three, focuses on forensic aesthetics, informed by Ralph Rugoff's *Scene of the Crime* (1997) and the artwork, *In Camera* (2007) by artist Kathryn Smith. I examine the visible and invisible traces of violence, considering how my artworks functions as a material archive of absence and presence. Traces left behind on these objects speak to the subtle yet powerful ways in which space is marked, inhabited and remembered. Mould-making in my practice functions as a means of capturing traces. Slip-casting bricks, embedding fabric into clay and rolling a slab of porcelain clay over dirty, textured cement surfaces literally captures the residue of prior interactions, bringing these unseen traces into the now. In this way my materials are not objects; they are carriers of evidence. Through these architectural trace elements, I invite the viewer to engage with the relationship between present materiality and absence, reflecting on the spaces women inhabit and the covert and implicit traces of threat and fear that are left behind.

4.1 CONCLUSION TO MINI THESIS

My mini-thesis explores the relationship between floor surfaces, space, gendered violence, forensic aesthetics, and, most importantly, the persistent presence of female fear through a practice-led approach. In doing so, within my practice, I have taken it from the angle of someone, like myself who fears the potential of violence, inspired by the fragmented familiarity of my Ma's kitchen tiles, I gradually turned my approach towards intimate reflections of the concept of "safe spaces," grounded by the rise in femicide in South Africa. My Ma's kitchen tiles, cracked and weathered away, became more than a familiar surface, it became a silent storybook, one that suggests the presence and stories of many who have walked across it throughout my childhood and adolescent years. Together, this perspective led me to reflect on how different types of spaces—private, liminal and public—hold emotional charge, preserving the traces of those who have transversed through them, subtly recording traces of human presence, lived-experiences and the ever-present potential for danger.

Positioning the concept of "safe spaces" in the forefront, examines how private, liminal, and public sites can simultaneously encompass comfort and the potential for danger. By foregrounding the floor surface as the body's primary point of contact, my research examines how sites serve as repositories of human presence, memory and potential harm. Through my practice-led research and exhibition, *The Remnants of Space* (2025), I demonstrate that seemingly neutral ground can capture human presence. For example, the porcelain brick paver series, cast from paving stones conceived in response to the space where the murder of Uyinene Mrwetyana took place, foreground the latent threat recorded within every day, public sites. The bisque tile series (Figure 15-21) (2024), reframes a mass-produced object as an indicator of place. While, the porcelain textured "fabric tiles," bear the impressions of lingerie, bridging the challenge of association between protection and exposure. Taken together, my practice-led research illustrate that spaces, places and surfaces beneath our feet all bear traces of potential of danger, highlighting how fear is subtly present in both material and spatial contexts.

Grounding my practice in mould-making to capture and preserve surface traces, I have thereby expanded my interpretation of what defines a trace. The repetitive nature of the mould making

process also highlights the cyclical nature of fear that women embody in their day-today navigation of space.

By focusing on floor surfaces as sites of embodied interaction, my mini-thesis extends on feminist and spatial discourses with a personal, artistic perspective. Drawing influence from contemporary South African artists: Penny Siopis's *Shadow Shame Again* (2021) who utilised found footage from a flea market to elicit the haunting presence of femicide, and create an emotionally charged film that highlights the reality that violence lingers like a shadow in both public and private spaces. Similarly, I explore Igshaan Adams's vinyl floor surface series to speak to the relationship between bodily movement and spatial memory. In the subsection, *Between rooms: The importance of storytelling in Igshaan Adams's work*, Adams noted that he began to see the floor as a kind of map—where traces record events that had previously occurred. This concept contextualised the overall thematics of this paper, as I share the same view that surfaces quietly carry the traces of those who have passed across.

In addition, the works of Sue Williamson *Truth Games* (1998) and Gabrielle Goliath's *Chorus* (2021) were analysed, with specific emphasis placed on their engagement with text and storytelling, foregrounding the role of inscription. In my practice-led research, the inscription of the porcelain tile Made in South Africa (Figures 47-48) (2024), functions as symbolic marker for the high rate of femicide in South Africa. While, the inclusion of chain WhatsApp text messages—such as "Get a cab and let me know when you home safely" (Figure 52) (2024) aligns with the essence of underlying fear women navigate, aligning with Siopis's thematic focus on vulnerability in public and private spaces. The analysis of Kathryn Smith's body of work, which utilises ultraviolet light on canvas to explore themes of the visibility and invisibility of forensic aesthetics, draws focus to implicit traces. I align with Smith's approach, as my practice seeks to reveal subtle, often unnoticed physical remnants through mould-making. This process enables me to record, materialise and preserve subtle traces of prior interactions.

Collectively, these artists have informed my exploration of how material, process, and concept intertwine to generate a conversation between fear, space and storytelling. My use of porcelain, a medium both delicate and durable, extends the discourse of forensic aesthetics, capturing the invisible imprints of bodily presence within architectural surfaces. Unlike, traditional forensic

practices that seek to expose violent events, my process preserves subtle and often invisible traces of bodily interaction within spaces that are simultaneously perceived as both safe and precarious. By capturing traces through mould-making, I preserve moments of interaction and memory, aligning closely with my belief that floors are quiet archives of human interaction.The fragility of porcelain acts as a metaphor for the gendered experience of moving through space in a society where fear is both a personal and collective condition. My artworks draw attention to the ways in which women's movements and experiences inscribe themselves into the spaces they inhabit.

By framing floor surfaces as sites of embodied presence, my practice contributes to both contemporary feminist art discourse and the broader discourse of space, potential violence, female fear and vulnerability. The contribution of this practice-led research is that it reimagines the floor as a textured archive, where invisible narratives of presence and absence are made visible, fragile, and open to reflection. The contribution is separated into two: Firstly, a conceptual reframing of floor surfaces as sites of pause and contemplation in the deliberation of femicide and the female fear of violence in public spaces. Secondly the manifestation of a material practice that uses mould-making to preserve and amplify traces for viewers to engage and reflect upon. In essence, this mini-thesis and practice-led research examines how overlooked surfaces hold immense significance, bearing (through perception and material engagement) the traces of those who have traversed upon them.

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APPENDIX A: EXHIBITION INSTALLATION – PHOTOGRAPHIC RECORD

The installation photographs taken by Leroy Payne document and capture the exhibition as an extension of the practice-led research, where spatial arrangement, scale, lighting, and bodily orientation serve as research instruments that activate embodied awareness, vulnerability and directs the audience gaze on floor surfaces.

Figure 68: Caryn Le Kay, *The Remnants of Space* (2025). Ceramic exhibition, Makhanda, 1820 Settlers National Monument: New Gallery, floor installation views, photography by Leroy Payne.

Figure 69: Caryn Le Kay, The Remnants of Space (2025). Ceramic exhibition, Makhanda, 1820 Settlers National Monument: New Gallery, floor installation views, photography by Leroy Payne.

Figure 70: Caryn Le Kay, *The Remnants of Space* (2025). Ceramic exhibition, Makhanda, 1820 Settlers National Monument: New Gallery, floor installation views, photography by Leroy Payne.

Figure 71: Caryn Le Kay, *The Remnants of Space* (2025). Ceramic exhibition, Makhanda, 1820 Settlers National Monument: New Gallery, floor installation views, photography Leroy Payne.

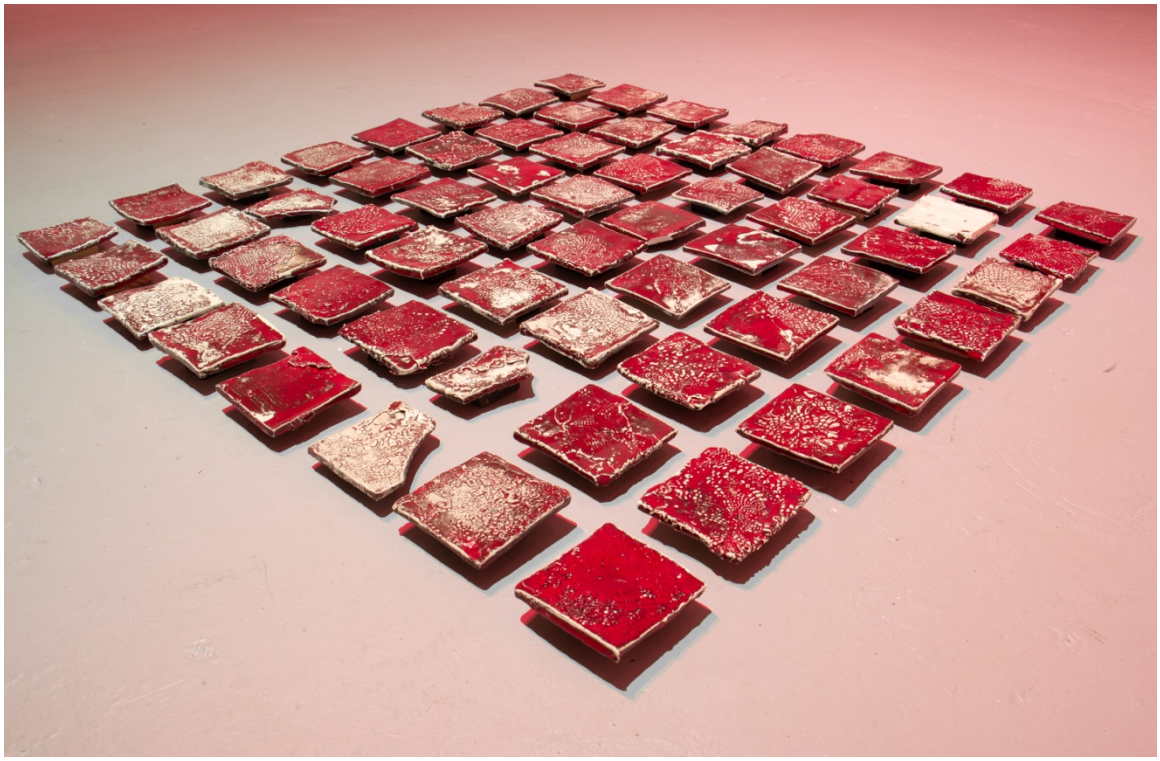

Figure 72: Caryn Le Kay, *The Remnants of Space* (2025). Ceramic exhibition, Makhanda, 1820 Settlers National Monument: New Gallery, floor installation views, photography by Leroy Payne.

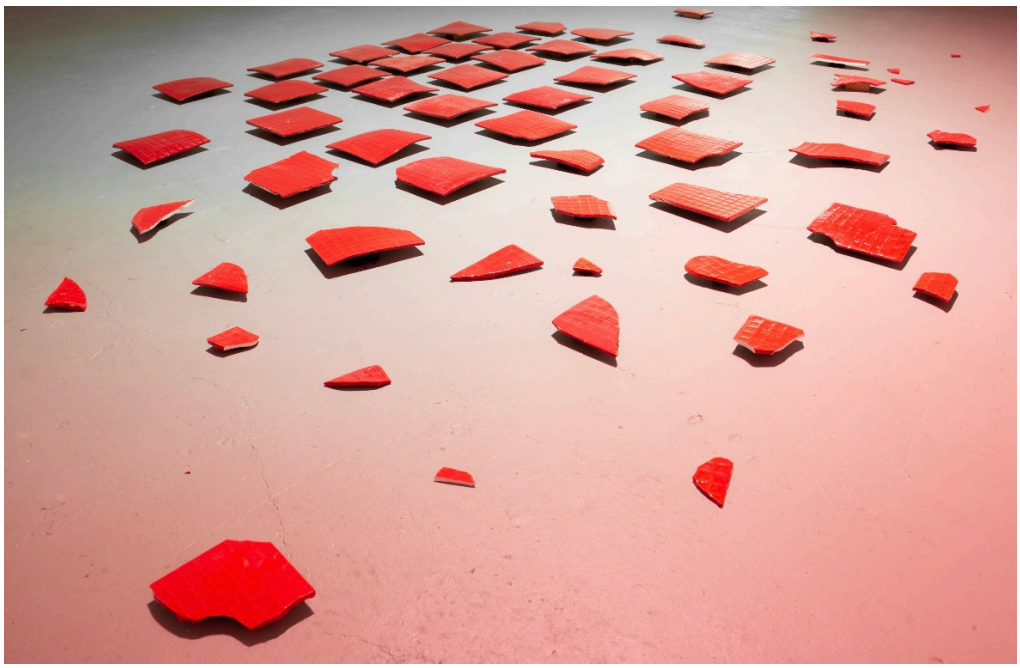

Figure 73: Caryn Le Kay, *The Remnants of Space* (2025). Ceramic exhibition, Makhanda, 1820 Settlers National Monument: New Gallery, floor installation views, photography by Leroy Payne.

Figure 74: Caryn Le Kay, *The Remnants of Space* (2025). Ceramic exhibition, Makhanda, 1820 Settlers National Monument: New Gallery, floor installation views, photography by Leroy Payne.

Figure 75: Caryn Le Kay, *The Remnants of Space* (2025). Ceramic exhibition, Makhanda, 1820 Settlers National Monument: New Gallery, floor installation views, photography by Leroy Payne.

Figure 76: Caryn Le Kay, *The Remnants of Space* (2025). Ceramic exhibition, Makhanda, 1820 Settlers National Monument: New Gallery, floor installation views, photography by Leroy Payne.

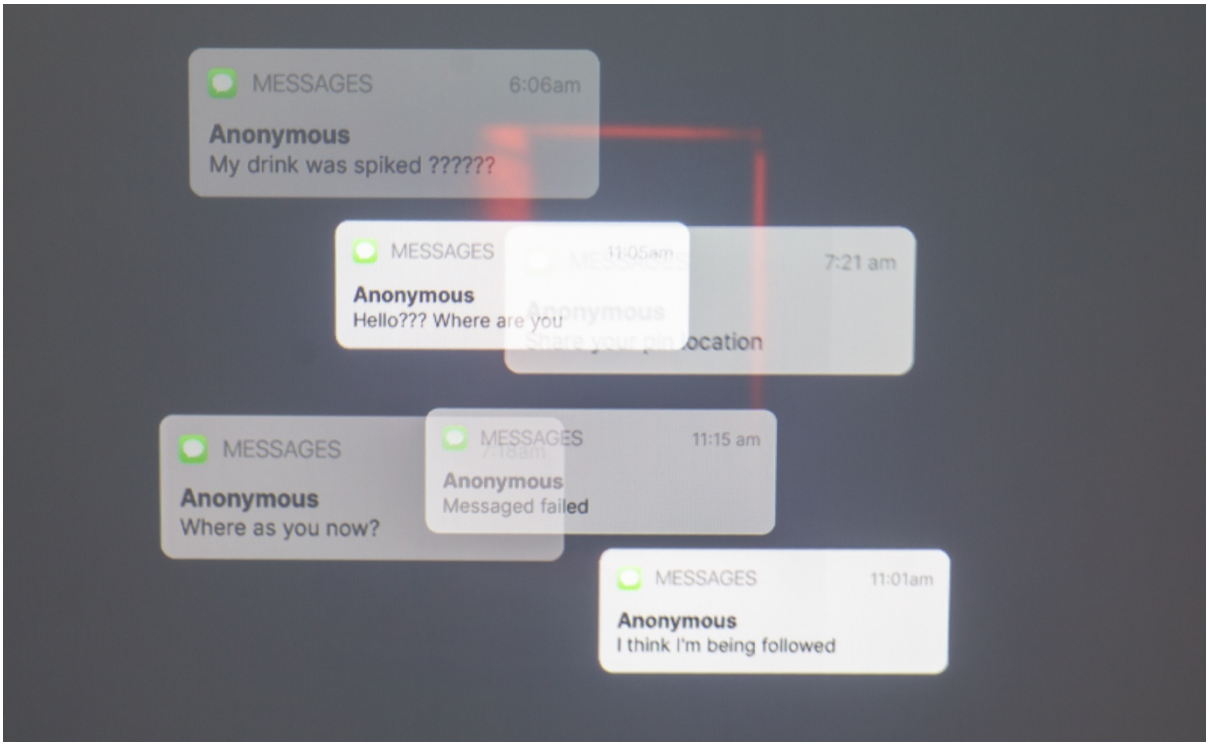

Figure 77: Caryn Le Kay, The Remnants of Space (2025). Ceramic exhibition, Makhanda, 1820 Settlers National Monument: New Gallery, video installation views, photography by Leroy Payne.

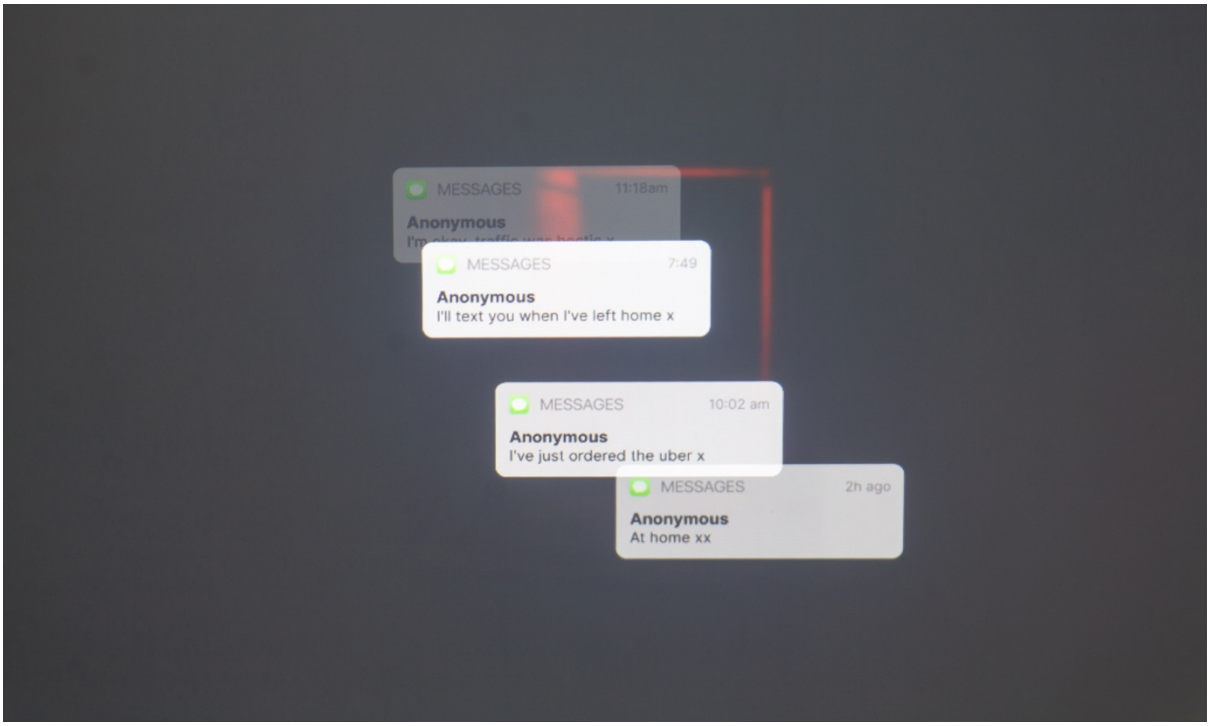

Figure 78: : Caryn Le Kay, *The Remnants of Space* (2025). Ceramic exhibition, Makhanda, 1820 Settlers National Monument: New Gallery, video installation views, photography by Leroy Payne.

APPENDIX B: ETHICS APPROVAL

Letter from the Rhodes University Ethics Committee confirming that I have been approved and received ethical clearance for the following Master in Fine Art research.

RHODES UNIVERSITY
Where leaders learn

Rhodes University Human Research Ethics Committee
PO Box 94, Makhanda, 6140, South Africa
t: +27 (0) 46 603 7727
f: +27 (0) 46 603 8822
e: ethics-committee@ru.ac.za
NHREC Registration number: RC-241114-045
https://www.ru.ac.za/researchgateway/ethics/

4 April 2024

Miss Caryn lé Kay

Email: g19l1902@campus.ru.ac.za

Review Reference: 2024-7620-8464

Dear Miss lé Kay

Title: 'Safe Spaces' A Visual Dialogue on Gender-base Violence through the Art of Trace-making

Researcher: Miss Caryn lé Kay

Supervisor (s): Prof Maureen de Jager, Prof Ruth Simbao.

This letter confirms that the above research proposal has been reviewed and **APPROVED** by the Humanities Faculty Research Ethics Committee (HF-REC). Your Approval number is: 2024-7620-8464

Approval has been granted for 1 year. An annual progress report will be required in order to renew approval for an additional period. You will receive an email notifying you when the annual report is due.

Please ensure that the Humanities Faculty REC is notified should any substantive change(s) be made, for whatever reason, during the research process. This includes changes in investigators. Please also ensure that a brief report is submitted to the ethics committee on the completion of the research. The purpose of this report is to indicate whether the research was conducted successfully, if any aspects could not be completed, or if any problems arose that the Humanities Faculty REC should be aware of. If a thesis or dissertation arising from this research is submitted to the library's electronic theses and dissertations (ETD) repository, please notify the committee of the date of submission and/or any reference or cataloguing number allocated.

Sincerely,

Dr Priscilla Boshoff

Chair: Humanities Faculty Research Ethics Committee