

WEZILE HARMANS

Artist | Researcher

Director at In Transit (*Community-led research space*)

ABOUT

My practice is centered on reimaging the ways in which our communities' experiences are documented and archived. It emphasizes the everyday, often overlooked practices that, when traced reveal a profound cumulative impact. My approach offers a distinctive methodology aimed at capturing the complex, layered and frequently contradictory stories and identities.



- Reveal the impact of knowledge transmission towards our communities.
- Ways in which Human Rights experiences are documented and archived.
- Counter narratives through our everyday practices.
- Act of creating as a memory carrier
- Oral and embodied engagement as alternatives methodologies.



PROJECTS

UMDIYADIYA



The work is inspired by collective memories and seeks to track historical events in a black household during turbulent past. The work encompasses a hand sewed mutton cloth, bandages, and notes attached reflecting on experiences with family and friends.

Encountering kindness and softness within rough and uncomfortable spaces and situations, the work suggests that **there can be love in spaces you might consider “broken”** and that, in some instances, beautiful memories were made there which deserve to be remembered.



THESE VOICES

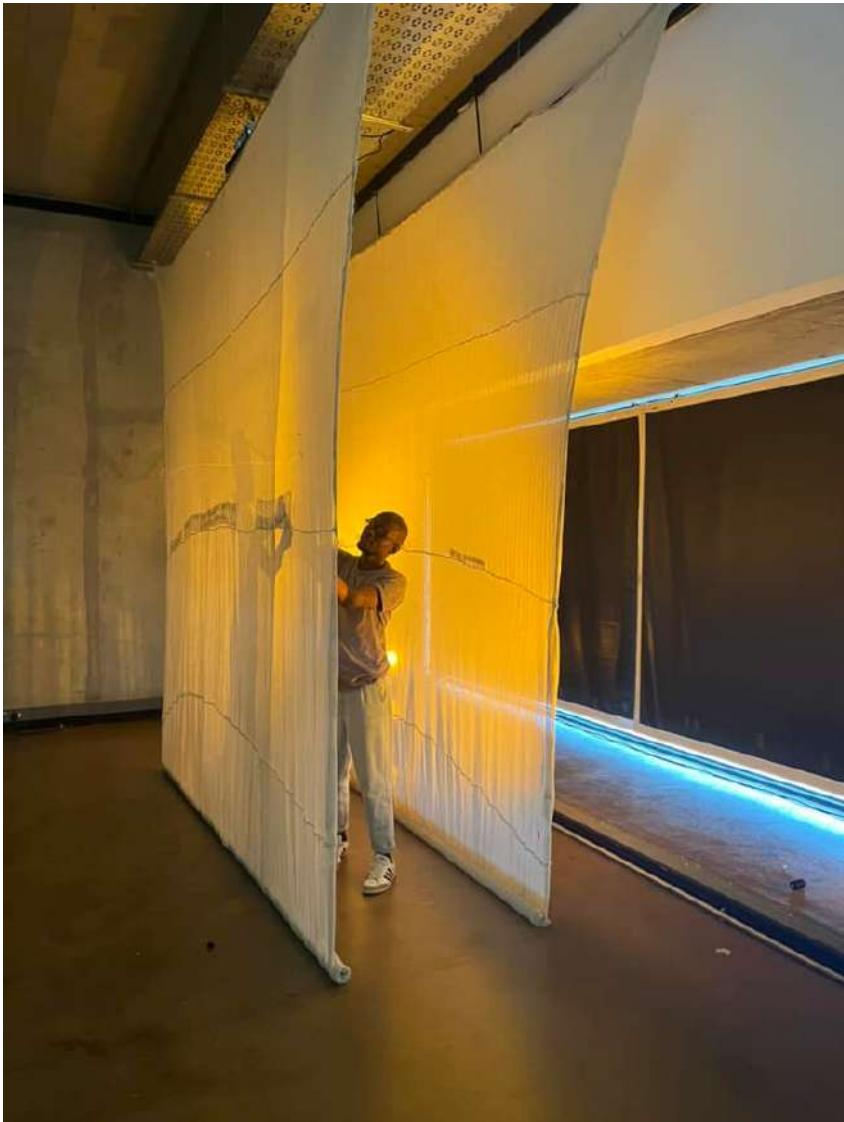


I use bandages, newspapers, and mutton cloth. These materials are soft yet heavy, they can absorb strong substances and leave traces when meet any foreign object. These materials have been selected as a caution point.

When you look at someone with a bandage on, you constantly position yourself in a place of kindness. I am fascinated by materials that have lived longer, they have somehow ability to remind us to *pause* and *feel*.

A corridor made up of hand sewed mutton cloth with light bulb installed shines inside the corridor, reflecting the bodies of those exploring the corridor. Inside the installation there are phrases brims with affirmation and self-love. “Love alone is sufficient”, “Be good in my memories”.

The phrases recount the memory, lived experiences and seeks hope that we can approach familiar spaces *that* hold traumatic events with a greater courage.



WHEN WE REMEMBER



When we remember is continuation of *Umdiyadiya*. The installation is grounded in the symbolic and material act of hand sewing. Found light fabrics are stitched together to form a square, evoking the nature of informal settlements that surround South Africa's major cities. These spaces, often harsh and precarious, are simultaneously sites of survival, resilience and community.

By inviting audiences to continue the sewing, the work transforms into a collective gesture of building, remembering and imagining home.

The process becomes more important than the outcome, reflecting the unfinished nature of memory and history. The work emphasizes the tactile qualities of fabric, thread and found objects passed down through families.

These items are not neutral, they carry with them emotional weight and historical resonance. Each stitch inscribes a memory, a connection or an act of repair, drawing attention to **how material practices can embody remembrance**.

The installation becomes a space where softness and kindness exist alongside brokenness and hardship.



LOCATING SPACES OF URGENCY.

CHAPTER 1: ENDLOVINI



Fig. 1. Walmer Township/Gqebera and the adjacent airport (adapted from Google Earth Map data 2016, AfriGIS (Pty) Ltd, Google Imagery 2016).

If you visit any black area in South Africa - especially in the city - you will find a housing section called ENDLOVINI. The Nguni term has a double meaning.

The first literal translation is "at the elephant/place of the elephant", The second meaning is more nuanced and slightly loaded: "the place at which we charged in and settled".

The term invokes, at least for mother-tongue speakers, a powerful image of resistance. In collaboration with *In Transit*, we question and exercise the notion of collective remembering and explore how that can patiently help one to have a clear picture of a certain events that happened and transpired, looking at *Endlovini* as a space of urgency and as a form of archive.



Ukundlova is an act of identifying a vacant piece of land on which to settle. Thereafter, a list of names is drawn up from backyard dwellers, new arrivals in the city and young adults looking to leave home out of necessity.



Once that is done, residents come together to partition the vacant land, so those in need of space are apportioned plots. Those allocated these plots then buy or source material and start building their shacks. Necessities such as water, sanitation and electricity are often an afterthought and tend to be superseded by the urgent need to have a roof over one's head. There are many such *Endlovini* settlements in the Eastern Cape (where the term originates) - stretching from Port Elizabeth, Port Alfred and Jeffreys Bay and beyond other cities) This is how most new settlements spring up or at least this one of the ways in which they do. But the process is often complicated by bureaucracy. Officialdom dictates that such settlements are considered illegal because they come into existence without permission from the relevant authorities.



Fig. 2. Map showing the location of Wells Estate (boundaries outlined in green) in relation to Coega Industrial Development Zone (approximate southern boundaries shown in blue) and Markman Industrial Area (magenta borders) (adapted from Google Earth Map data 2016, AfriGIS (Pty) Ltd, Google Imagery 2016).

Endlovini as a Form of Archive is an installation rooted in ideas of memory, place-making, and resistance. Constructed from found objects, silk cloth, mutton cloth, thread, and wood. The work draws from the act of *Ukundlova*, the informal identification and occupation of land by those in need. This act is not just about survival, but about community-building and asserting presence in the face of systemic neglect.

The installation reflects a deep interest in how people and places come into existence, and how their stories are preserved. While researching informal settlements in the Eastern Cape, the artist uncovered inconsistencies between official records and the oral histories of residents. Government documents claimed certain settlements began in the 1980s, while local elders, including the artist's uncle, remembered much earlier origins. These stories, told with warmth and conviction, revealed how communal memory often holds a deeper truth than institutional records.



Endlovini becomes both a literal shelter and a symbolic archive containing materials and memories that speak to collective endurance. The choice of soft and hard materials mirrors the emotional and physical responses to instability: softness as care and resilience; hard structures as markers of space and identity. The installation does not merely represent a settlement, but embodies its spirit born from urgency, shaped by necessity, and held together by memory.

Through this work, the artist challenges the authority of official narratives and emphasizes the role of lived experience in historical truth. *Endlovini* as a Form of Archive asks:

- Who controls history?
- How do we remember? And what materials do we use to preserve it?

In doing so, the installation honours informal settlements not only as spaces of survival but as repositories of collective memory and creative resistance.





@rainhadasucata1



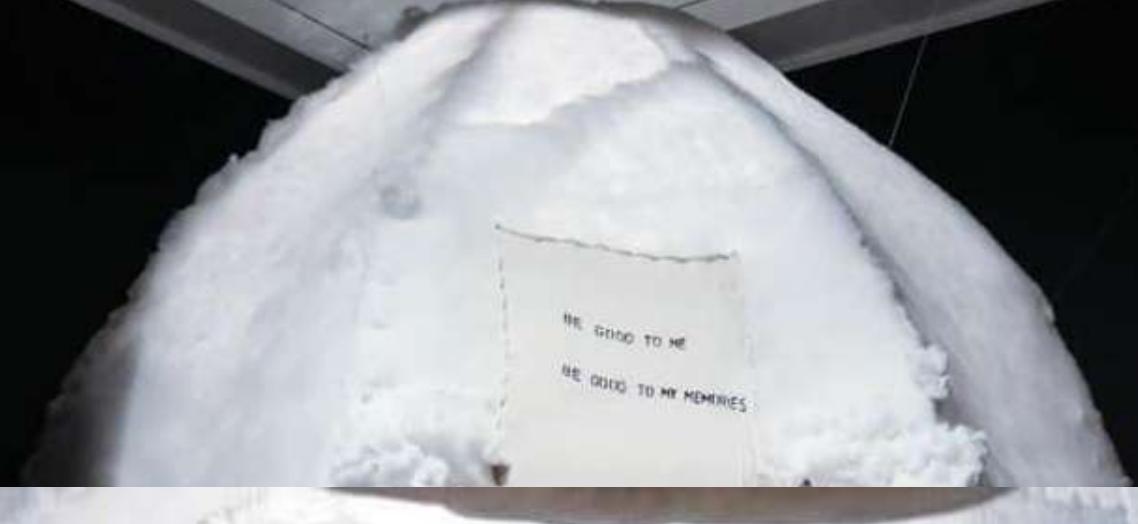
WAMKELEKILE



Traditional African builders constructed huts for sound reasons. They were easier to build from a circular foundation with cheap, readily available raw materials: mud, and tree branches. But the logic was not just in the architecture, it was mostly in the communalism and complementary nature of society. I have developed an interest in seeing these spaces has structures that summon us to remember our past and reconsider our future. Buildings and Houses play a significant role in our lives. They can be used as a space of congregation, shelter, a spot for further direction, or a landmark to engage or to further conversation. Some contribute as tourist attractions and to the aesthetics of place.

Huts played a more societal role. Long ago, in the west of Kenya, for example, people sought safety in numbers and clustered together in walled villages for protection. Settlements were surrounded by strong mud wall, with a ditch outside it.

With this rich history of huts, I am curious about the task of re-creation and how to imagine softness with roughness as a gate way, which is similar to looking for ways in which people position themselves in a place of kindness while constantly facing trauma. I see these structures as caution points, that prepare both ourselves and the spaces around us. These acts of repair create awareness and an invitation to imagine and renew, allowing us to connect the past and the present without creating further trauma.



BE GOOD TO ME
BE GOOD TO MY MEMORIES

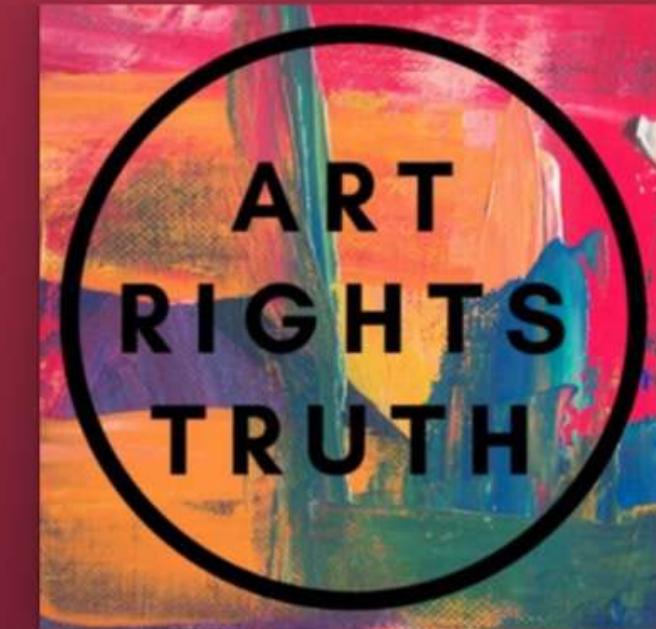


Artistic Documentation and New Ways of Doing Human Rights.

CONVERSATION:

In this episode, Art Rights Truth co-Principle Investigator and Professor of Politics and Applied Human Rights, Paul Gready and Artist and Researcher Wezile Harmans discuss the role of documentation in political art, and how artwork may provide alternative means of documentation from those traditionally used in human rights work.

[Click here to Listen](#)



Artistic Documentation and New Ways of Doing Human Rights, with Paul Gready and Wezile Harmans
Rights in Dialogue: Voices in Art and Activism

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LIVING IN ARCHIVE



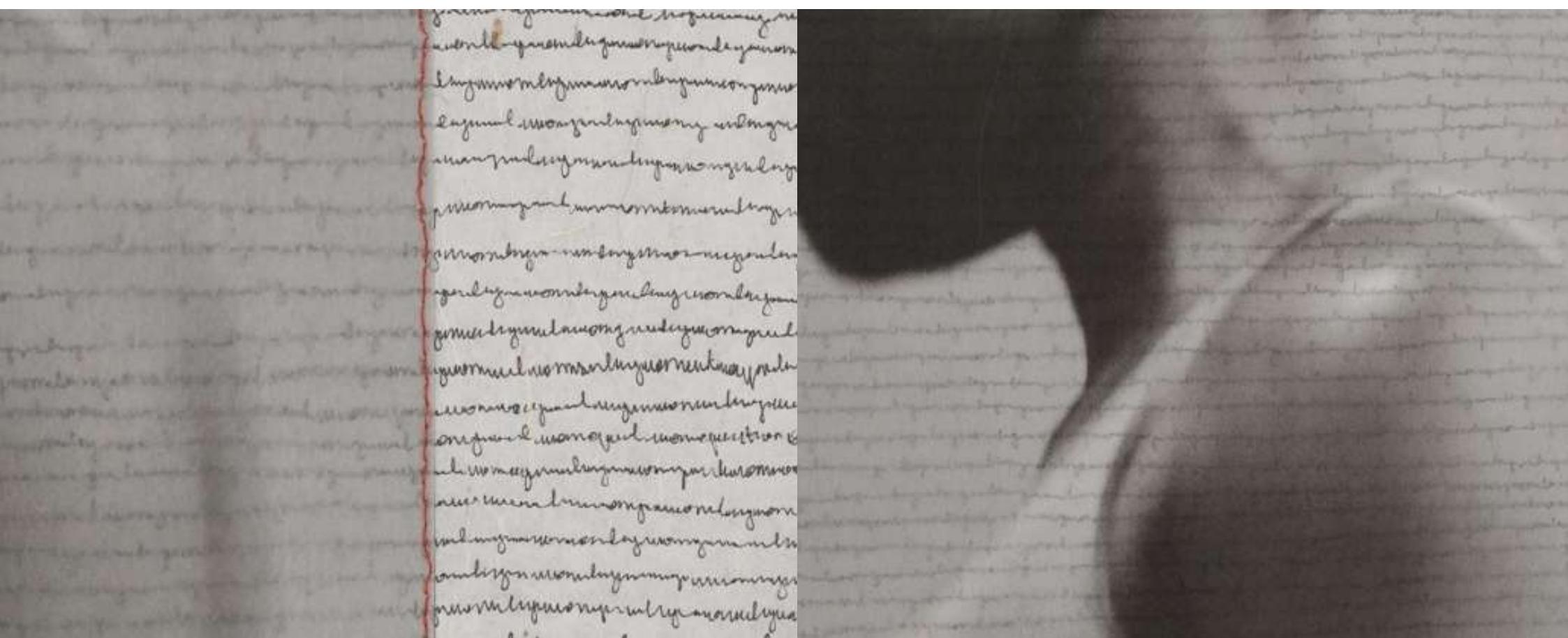
What it means to be living (in) archives particularly in the context of Post-Apartheid South Africa. Working towards alternative methodologies for documenting and archiving the multiple truths of the human rights experience.

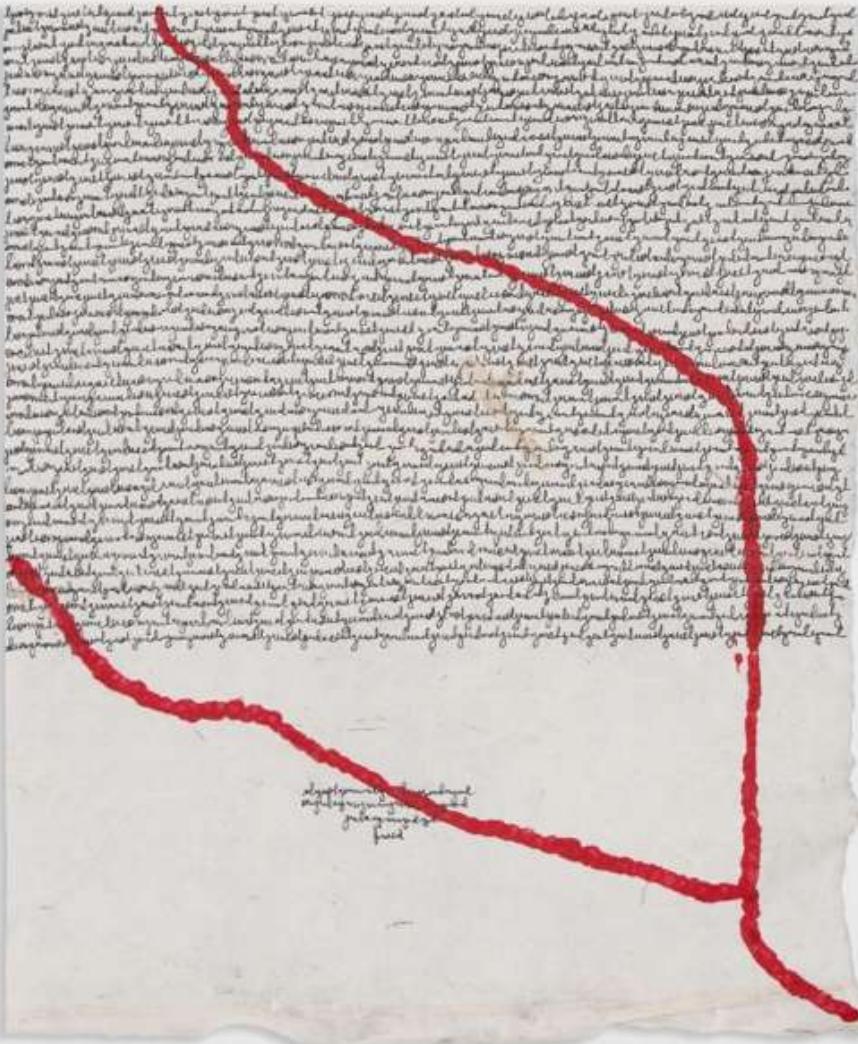
My research centres on reimagining the ways in which human rights experiences particularly within the context of post-apartheid South Africa are documented and archived. It emphasizes the everyday, often overlooked practices that, when traced, reveal a profound cumulative impact. In a nation still contending with the enduring legacies of apartheid, my approach offers a distinctive methodology aimed at capturing the complex, layered, and frequently contradictory truths that emerge from histories of violence, trauma, and resistance.



In my ongoing project, *Locating Spaces of Urgency*, I explore innovative modes of capturing and conveying these realities. Rather than depending solely on conventional institutional documentation such as written records or formal testimonies my practice foregrounds alternative methodologies, including oral and embodied engagements, which more accurately reflect the lived experiences of individuals and communities.

This approach entails a multi-layered process of engagement, incorporating oral histories, personal narratives, visual art, and multimedia technologies. Such methods allow for the representation of the non-linear, often fragmented ways in which human rights violations and responses to them are experienced and remembered.



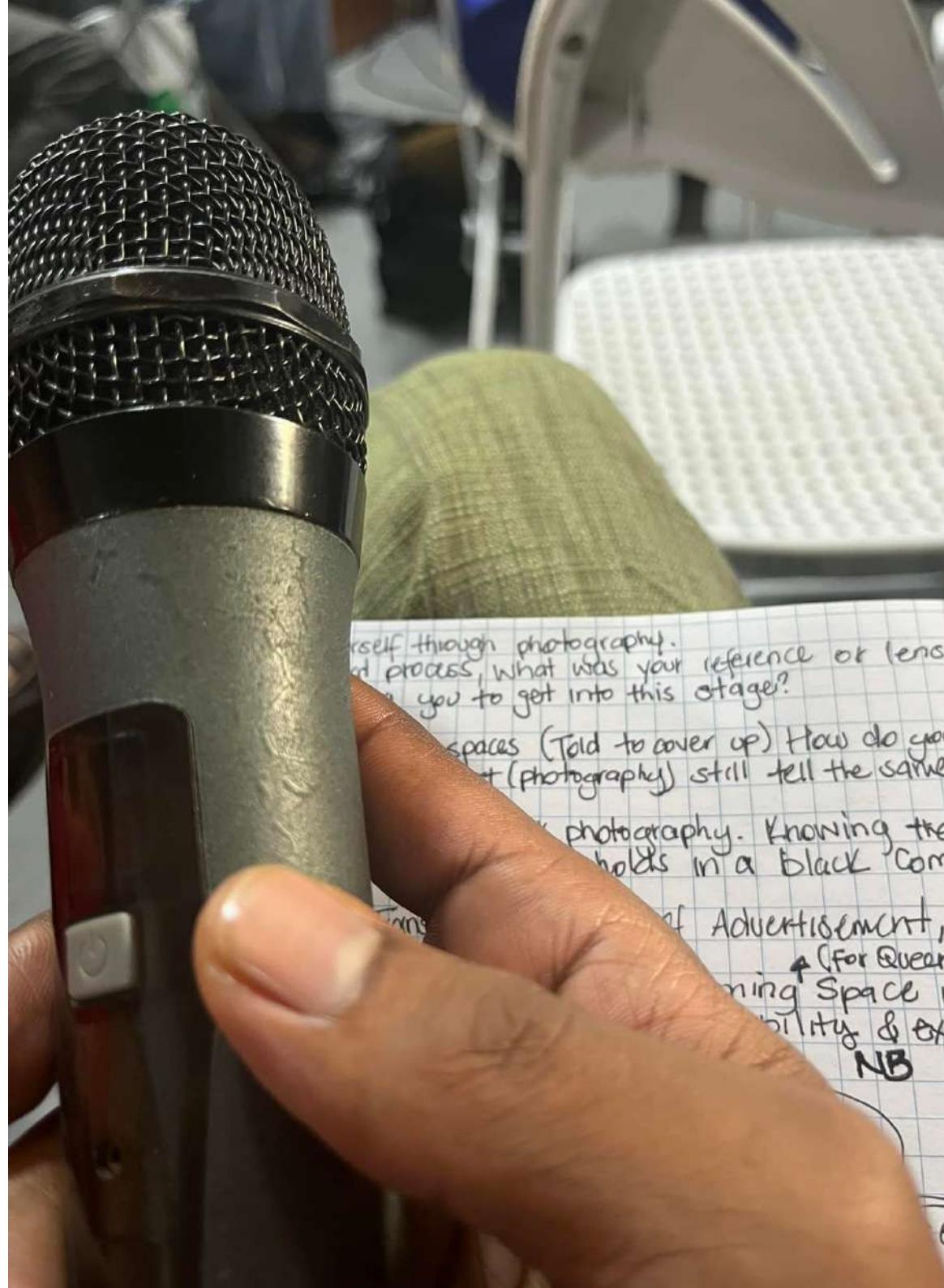


A critical component of this methodology is the emphasis on **counter-narratives**. In post-apartheid South Africa, where state-sanctioned versions of history are continually contested, my work seeks to amplify voices and perspectives that have been marginalized or silenced. This includes attending to **personal truths**, those nuanced and intimate accounts that frequently fall outside the purview of legal or governmental records. In doing so, my research challenges the authority of official archives and instead contributes to the creation of alternative memory spaces, inclusive of narratives from victims, perpetrators, and bystanders alike.

By advocating for the recognition of **multiple truths**, my work critiques the notion of a singular, definitive historical account. It acknowledges that the lived realities of oppression, resistance, and survival cannot be fully encapsulated within one dominant narrative. Instead, my projects often utilize **sensory-based methodologies** such as sound, visual imagery, and the spatiality of place to evoke the emotional and psychological dimensions of these experiences.

Furthermore, through a research-based art practice and performance framework, this work facilitates critical dialogue regarding the ways in which contemporary generations interpret and engage with the legacy of apartheid. It also interrogates the function of archives in processes of healing and reconciliation, raising pertinent questions about what is preserved, how it is preserved, and who has the authority to decide what is remembered. Through these methodologies, my work engages with ongoing questions of **truth-telling, justice, and reconciliation** within the South African context. It seeks to surface underrecognized platforms and practices through which human rights can be reimagined and articulated in a post-apartheid world, illuminating the multifaceted and layered nature of these processes.

This research contributes to broader conversations surrounding documentation, memory, and historical justice in societies emerging from systemic violence. It proposes a paradigm that embraces diverse, and at times conflicting, narratives creating space for a multiplicity of human rights experiences to be acknowledged, understood, and preserved.





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WE REGRET TO INFORM YOU



"In this series 'We Regret to Inform You', Harmans embodies various emotional, and bodily states related to the daily hustle. Against the backdrop of the world's increasing unemployment rate, which according to different sources reaches between 40 and 60% of the population, he explores the stages of our personal vulnerability as individuals living without work, looking for work, getting work, fighting to keep work and losing the position that was supposed to give us stability. Interested in how all these processes can be read as constant social performance , he makes visible the degrees to which we are repeatedly performing our own lives in the face of disorienting bureaucracies. By hiding our true emotions and wearing masks according to the situation we want to appear suitable for; we end up losing a part of our true selves. Although Harmans is convinced that notifications 'regretting to inform us will keep coming, the artists' focus is on the agency we have in terms of how we position ourselves once confronted with the news. How can our positioning work in our favour or against us? Following this question, the series seeks to reveal self-awareness as a tool to cure and repair a threatened confidence of self."

[Performance Review Click here](#)



RESEARCH RESIDENCY IN DAKAR



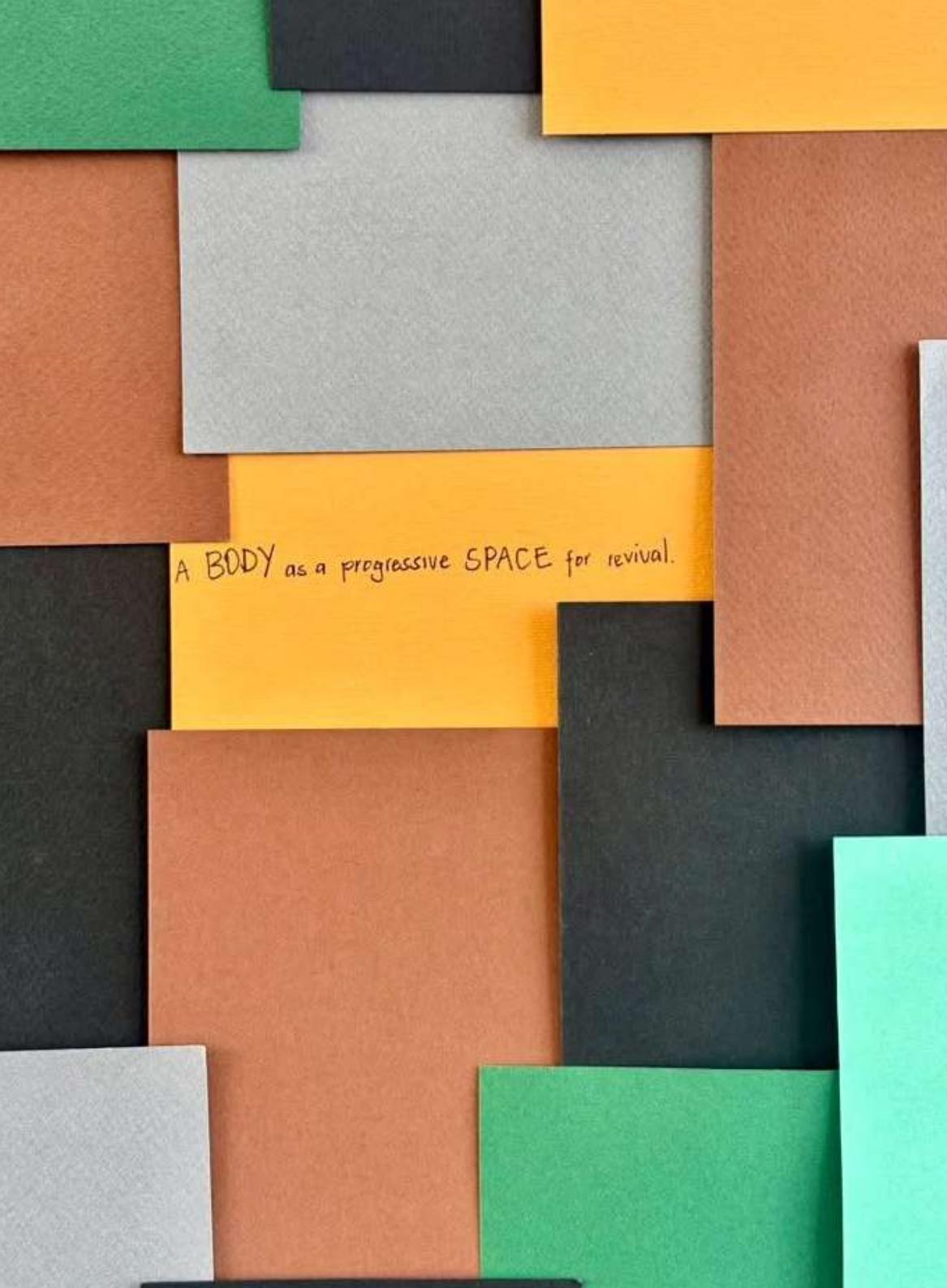
I have been interested in exploring ways people carry *Memory, Space* and *Movement* as coordinates to familiarity (Home) Arrived in Dakar during Ramadan month, special moment for me to experience the body negotiating the space using familiar materials and objects. - A Body as a progressive sense of space. Space to heal, to revive and to remember.

Our relationship with spaces is mapped through the materials and objects we carry - serving as coordinates of familiarity.

In Dakar, Senegal, I am exploring how we carry memories as living archives.

I've been collecting envelopes from different cities; they seem to hold a sense of remembrance - expressing, reversing, or at times even predicting certain events. Through this process, I began to ask myself:

Perhaps the Archive is open - open to collaboration, open to continuing the conversation.

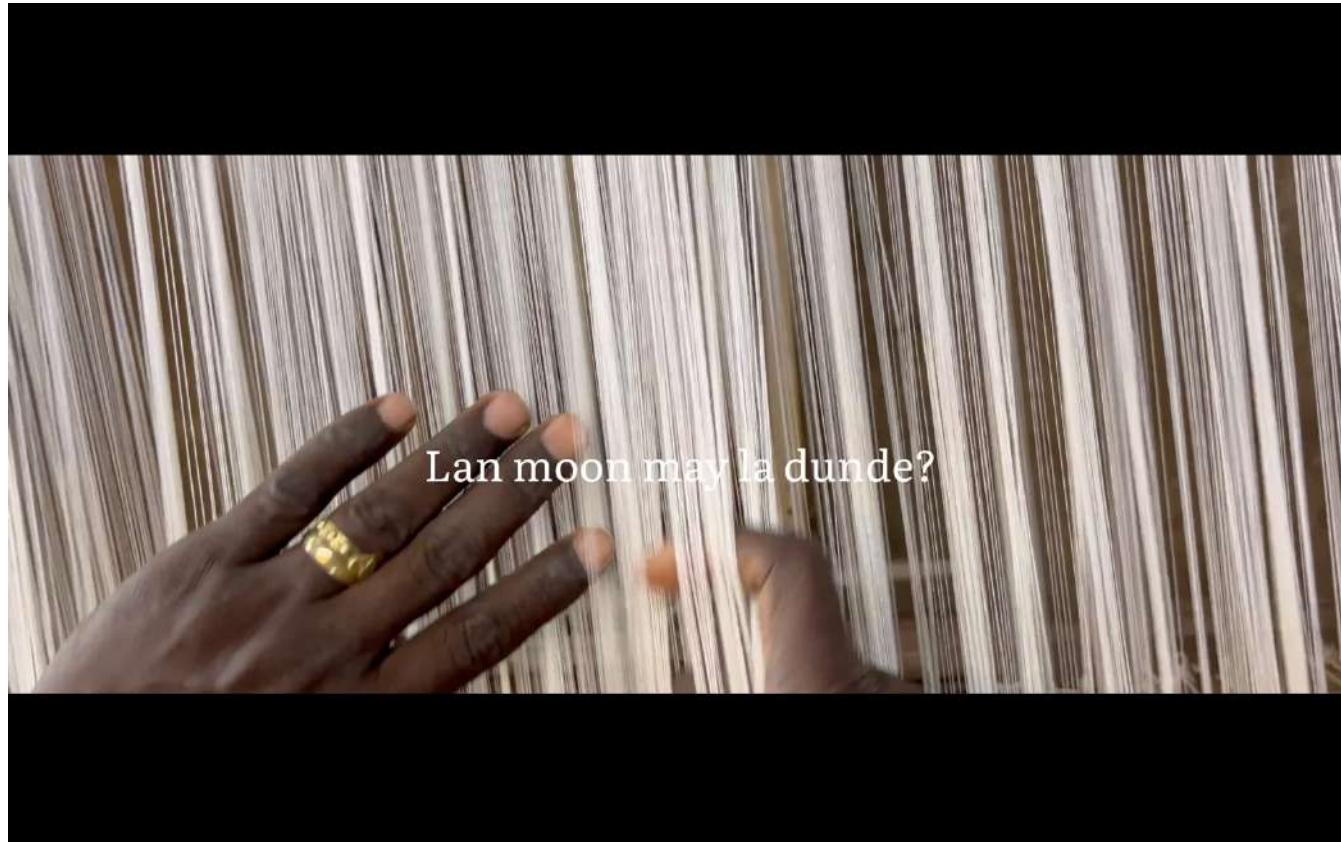


A BODY as a progressive SPACE for revival.



LAN MOON MAY LA DUNDE?

[Click here to watch video](#)



Lan moon may la dunde?
Video 7min:15sec

The everyday movements and sounds of Atelier Aissa Dione's workers, highlighting how they engage with labour, their chosen materials, and familiar objects. Through this, it explores a sense of connection and routine.

- What memories do you carry?
- What tokens of love, assurance, or belonging stay with you?

WHAT IS HOLDING YOU?

The body becomes a shifting sense of space, while objects and materials serve as evidence of existence. This piece explores how labour can act as a gateway to healing and remembrance. I'm interested in how we carry space and memory as coordinates that lead us back to familiarity.



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Lan moon may la dunde?



Lan moon may la dunde?

LOCATING SPACES OF URGENCY.

CHAPTER 2: OO-JIKELEZA

How do we locate conversations?

A compelling exploration of how informal spaces - like local taxis
- serve as sites of both crisis and connection.



How informal mobile spaces "Taxis" serve as site of crisis and connection.

The local taxis in South Africa, famously known as “*Oojikeleza*” - A Xhosa phrase roughly translates roaming around. - are more than just modes of transport; they act as mobile spaces where urgent social, economic, and personal issues unfold.

Within these taxis, the conversations, ranging from humour to discussions about health and trauma become a shared language that reflects broader societal struggles.

The conversations, such as discussions about *inyama ebomvu* or remedies for high blood pressure, reveal how these informal exchanges are not just about passing time, but about navigating collective pain and finding solidarity.

These conversations create a space where information is exchanged, but also where people process their lives, their fears, and their hopes.

There's an urgency in the way people talk, not just in the sense of needing immediate solutions, but in the way they articulate their struggles in a context that is often fleeting and informal. The idea of these taxis as mobile spaces of urgency is key.

The urgency within these conversations isn't just about the need to resolve problems quickly, it's also about creating a shared space for dialogue in a society that often feels fragmented or overwhelmed.

These conversations reflect a need to manage not only immediate crises but also ongoing, unspoken tensions, such as economic hardship and domestic issues.

Yet, there's also a subtle tension in these interactions. The way people communicate in these spaces is fluid, not always looking for resolution or answers, but rather a momentary release, a way to acknowledge shared experiences without necessarily solving them. This raises an important question:

Does this informal, urgent communication provide people with a sense of emotional refuge, or does it contribute to a larger system of avoidance, where urgent needs are acknowledged but never fully addressed?

The conversations that happen in these taxis seem to balance both the immediate need for solidarity and the reluctance to confront deeper structural issues.

Humour, for instance, often plays a crucial role in these interactions. It offers both relief and a way to process trauma, but it also risks trivializing the very real challenges people face. In this sense,

humour becomes a survival tool, acknowledging pain while deflecting its weight

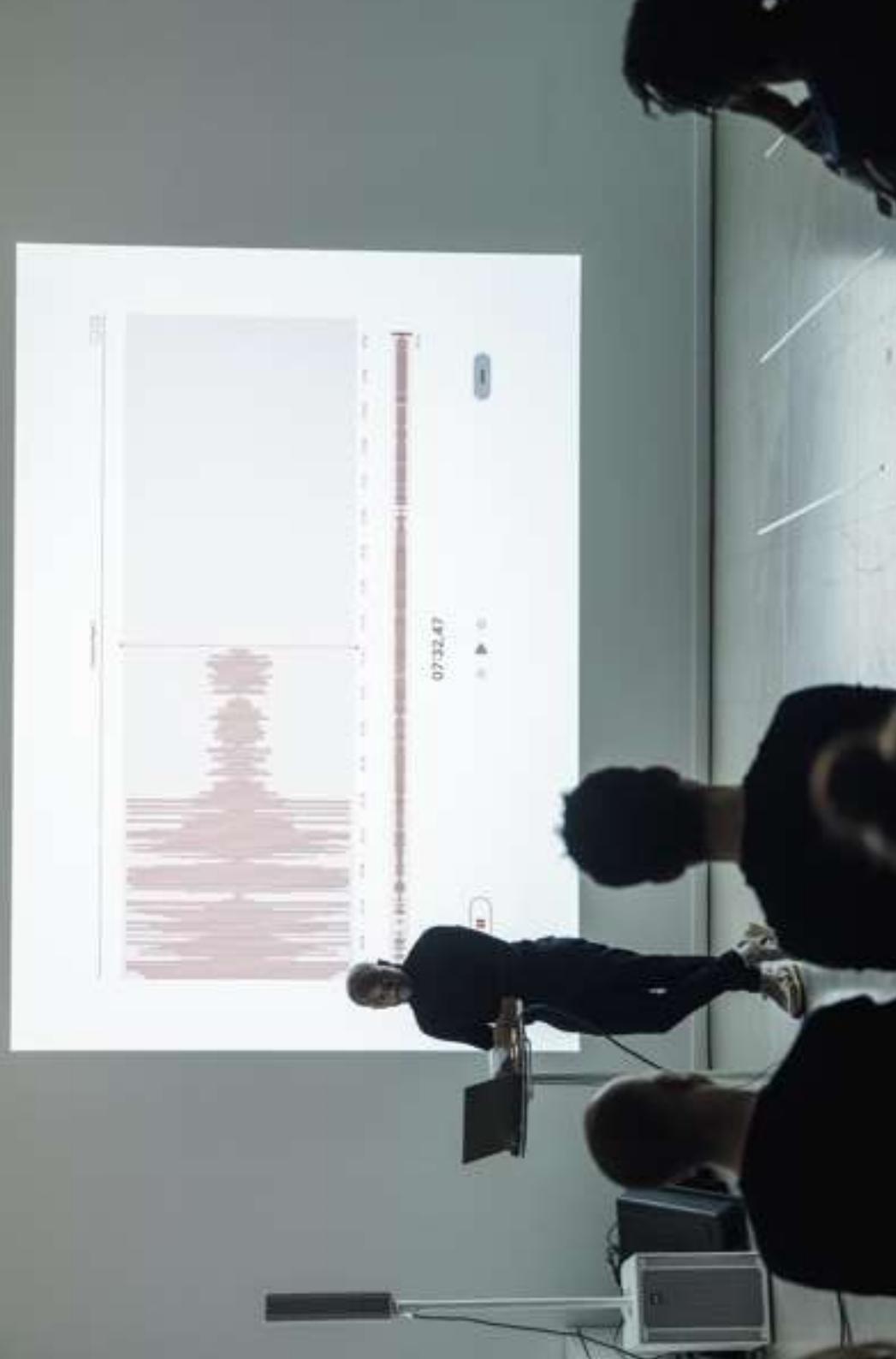
These mobile spaces act as emotional refuges and sites of collective resilience, where people find brief moments of connection and mutual understanding amidst ongoing crises.

However, I wonder if these conversations also create a kind of social stasis, where the urgent nature of the conversations doesn't always lead to long-term action or systemic change.

- Does the collective processing of pain in these spaces inspire deeper, transformative change, or is it simply a temporary release?

I'm curious how I can use my practice to explore possible links between the informal nature of these conversations and their impact on long-term societal change.

- Do these spaces inspire action, or do they primarily serve as emotional survival mechanisms?



ACTION PLAN (Field research)

We take multiple local taxi rides within and around the township, recording public conversations as they unfold in the present moment.

These recordings have neither a beginning nor an end, we simply capture what is happening at that time in the taxi.

Once collected, the conversations are organised into categories – ranging from health crises and remedies to politics, social affairs, or even causal banter and humour drawn from local stories, some carry generational knowledge, others regarded as myths.

After compiling these conversations, we return to the communities and visit common gathering and waiting spaces such as taxi ranks, sport fields, eatery venues, clinics and working spaces.

There, we introduce and play selected recordings according to the relevance of the audience. This creates opportunities for people to listen, respond and share their perspectives. Often, community members recognise the conversations but not in detail. Some add new information, others laugh and enjoy the humour, some prefer to listen quietly, while many engage in debate, offering strong opinions that themselves become new recordings, layered responses to the originals.

These exchanges extend the life of the conversations that began in taxis, creating a cycle of dialogue. Each participant gains something new: information about job opportunities, tips on household products, remedies of illnesses or simply shared social moments. In this way, knowledge continues to move through the community.

We believe these conversations should not remain confined to taxis alone. Someone who was not present during the ride might still benefit from what was shared. Collecting and reintroducing these conversations is both a form of archiving and an act of return, ensuring they reach the rightful audience – the community itself.

This process creates a living, accessible archive, whose impact can possibly be measured through the act of response and collative engagement.

Untitled Installation



"Harmans's bags do not contain clothes, documents nor food, even though he speaks of carrying such items when traveling. He asserts however that when moving from one place to another, we bring along other timelines of reality, displacement and the intangibility of landscape. His bags contain memories, dreams, hopes and fears."

From afar the installation appears to be strong and heavy. Upon closer inspection, one encounters the softness of the material; cotton, wrapped in mutton cloth. Almost as if the hopes and fears are protected in bandages. Harmans intends for the viewer to find kindness within rough and uncomfortable spaces.

One is reminded of the soft sculptures of Louise Bourgeois. The historical association of textiles with gender, sexuality and identity norms reimagines this piece in the context of place making. Notions of healing and tenderness are enveloped in this work"

– Usha Seejarim





Amani Mnkeni • 3rd+
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What do you carry with you when you move from one place to another?
A bag, a suitcase, a backpack? What do you put inside it?

Clothes, documents, toiletries, food?
What else do you bring along?

Your memories

Your dreams,

Your hopes,

Your fears?

Last Friday, I had the privilege of visiting "My Practice" art exhibition at Rosebank Mall by Brown Eyed Boy art pursuits. The artist, [Wezile Harmans](#) explores these questions through his artworks that engage with memory, reality, displacement, and landscape. He uses art as a tool for social change; to provoke thought, to educate and to share voices of individuals.

One of his artworks caught my eye. It was made up of collected bags of cotton wrapped up in mutton cloth. Wezile points me to the African reality of migration from rural areas and small towns to urban centres. From home to apartments, school hostels, flats; driven by necessity and opportunity.

But it also comes with a cost.

A cost of adapting to a new environment.

A cost of finding your identity and purpose.

A cost of leaving behind something or someone.

👉 What's in your bag as you journey through life?



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