

Into the Night Forest.

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"There is something they call recovery.
There is something you never recover."
- Lee Nash.



Introduction:

For as long as history is recorded, events of rape is mentioned. This brutal crime is a central point of discussion in South Africa as activists fight to end the crime because of the horrific lasting effects the victims must suffer through. In the book "Treating the Trauma of Rape: Cognitive Behavioural Therapy for PTSD," Dr Edna B. Foa and Dr Barbara Olasov Rothbaum explains that 1 month after the event of rape, 27% of women are suicidal; this number increases to 50% 1-16 years after the event of rape (Foa and Rothbaum). Rape is an incredibly traumatic experience for victims; however, the lasting effect of rape is not a topic that is often discussed.

This body of work can be seen as research that adds to our knowledge of the trauma of rape. My art attempts to share the experiences of victims that suffer from the lasting effects of rape trauma.

This catalogue contains some of the research behind this body of work. Professor Sreejuga Dutta's research study "Women's journey of recovery from sexual assault trauma: a grounded theory" played a fundamental part in the conceptual formation of my body of work: "Gucco the Nigbo Forest." Another text that played a vital role in the formation of "Gucco the Nigbo Forest" is called "Treating the



Trauma of Rape: Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy for PTSD" by Edna B. Foa and Barbara Rothbaum. This publication looks at the long-term effects of rape trauma.

After unpacking the research that went into this body of work, we will dive deeper into the work, unpacking history, materials and the process of making.



Some of the Research behind "Into the Night Forest."

This section unpacks two primary texts that influenced my practice. This section starts with professor Duma's article "Women's Journey of Recovery from Sexual Assault Trauma: A Grounded Theory" a medical study that explores and analyses the recovering journey of women who were sexually assaulted. This article helped me to understand the phases I went through after the event of rape. The book "Treating the Trauma of Rape: Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy for PTSD" is the second text that influenced "Into the Night Forest."

This publication researched the horrid aftermath of rape and discusses different possible recovery methods for the victim.

Even though the statistics of rape cases are shockingly high, there is limited knowledge and research done on the journey of recovering from sexual assault. The lack of knowledge limits the treatment options for rape victims. The intention with this body of work is to visually represent the unfathomable space where rape victims find themselves after the event of rape.

With limited knowledge on the aftermath of rape, this body of work contributes as research on victim's journeys after the event of rape. Duma published a medical case study that highlights the theoretical framework that unpacks recovery from sexual assault. The findings of this study contributed to my body of work as it allowed me to better understand women's trauma after the event of rape. Not only did it contribute to my work, but it also phrased and validated my experience of rape trauma.

The findings of the study consists out of eight concepts: sexual assault trauma, ~~at~~ awakening, pragmatic acceptance¹, turning point, reclaiming what was lost, defining landmarks of healing², readiness for closure and returning to old self (Duma, Makwa and Benny (2008).

¹ Duma explains that during pragmatic acceptance, rape victims rationalise why the event of rape happened to them or come to terms with the reality of sexual assault (Duma, Makwa and Benny (2008). One of the participants of Duma's study explains that she chose not to dwell on the event of rape as a goal to me on (Duma, Makwa and Benny (2008).

² The concept 'defining own landmarks' explains what Duma's study participants regard as recovering from rape trauma. One participant believes that being able to easily talk about the event of rape defines her own landmarks: "I thought the thought that women can define their own landmarks gives me hope, but at the same time, it fills me with despair. The recovery period differs for every person, and I have not managed to experience these steps."







for the purpose of this paper, I will only unpack some of these findings that directly relate to this body of work.

Duma identified sexual assault as the first concept of recovering from sexual assault, with 'mental paralysis' as the primary ~~top~~ category (Duma, Mekwa and Denny 2008).

Majority of women experience mental paralysis during and even before the event of sexual assault (Duma, Mekwa and Denny 2008). During mental paralysis, victims are powerless. Mental paralysis is also known as Tonic Immobility (TI).

Tonic Immobility is explained as a temporary behavioural state of motor inhibition ~~to~~ to occur in response to interpersonal trauma (Abrams, et al. 2009). TI presents as catatonic-like

immobility with muscular hypertonicity and suppression of vocalisation (Schmidt et al. 2008).

Mental paralysis can be explained as the inability to move or reason. One of the participants in Duma's study illustrates a state of mental paralysis when saying:

"I could not move or think. My whole body was just heavy. I then realised that nothing was wrong with my body. I could move" (Duma, Mekwa and Denny 2008)

Another participant experienced a state of mental paralysis before the event of rape.

The participant describes their experience of mental paralysis as follows:



"He then said, 'Ride on the bicycle.' This did not make much sense, but I found myself getting on the bicycle. He then cycled with me as if I was a parcel that he was carrying. I could feel tears coming down my face, but I could not think straight..." (Duma, Mekwa and Denny, 2008).

Mental paralysis is an essential theme in my work because experiencing mental paralysis clouds one's understanding of the event of rape; it often makes people question the validity of their trauma. A research article on TI found that people who report TI-like behaviours are likely to recall vivid details of the traumatic event.

The article continues by stating that the capacity to remember while being in a state that keeps a person from escaping or being unable to resist contributes to worsened Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) symptoms (Abrams, et al. 2009). This research paper captures the emotional turmoil that sexual assault victims sit with when explaining ^{that} their experiences of TI have been linked to higher levels of guilt and self-blame arising from the belief that the victim should have done more to protect themselves (Abrams, et al. 2009). Understanding that I did not consciously decide to freeze during the assault helped me



to deal with the guilt and blame.

These cases that I have referred to explain the effect of TI or mental paralysis before and during the event of an assault. However, besides experiencing TI during the assault, I also experienced periods of TI after the event as a symptom of PTSD. One of the themes in this body of work is the experience of TI after the occurrence of rape. The knowledge and use of materials such as the use of wax, aims to create a visual representation of TI as a lingering effect of rape trauma.

Duma found that 'awakening' is the first step in the women's description of their journey of recovery (Duma, Mekwa and Benny 2008). Duma explains that during 'awakening' the rape victims realise the repercussions of rape and starts considering what the incident of rape means to them (Duma, Mekwa and Benny 2008). Duma explains that during 'awakening' victims do not have complete control of what is going on around them and often rely on other people's decisions or advice (Duma, Mekwa and Benny 2008).

After reading this case study, I realised that even though I was not in total control, I did not reach out



for help for an extended period. This means that I made decisions in my absent-minded state that influenced my recovery period. This ~~too~~ is also a reflection on my upbringing and how I've been taught to deal with negative experiences. Duma's case study highlights some of the emotional turmoil in victims. One example is self-blame.

"I still cannot stop thinking about the man and what I could have done to him to make him do that to me. You know, I am still concerned with the anger that for some reason I had invoked in that man." (Duma, Mekwa and Benny 2008).



The history of people's environments influences their awakening process. The environment that I grew up in consists of beliefs that anything that can harm a person's reputation should be hidden. I used layering in my practice; the materials used to layer range from bed sheets to chemical dust. Growing up in an environment that strives to hide anything that can harm one's reputation kept me from getting support and left me to unpack the reality of the assault by myself.

The next category in Duma's study is called burning point. It can be understood as moving forward or backwards, clockwise, or anti-clockwise, Victim or survivor stance, positive or negative movement (Duma, Melwa and Berry 2008). It is essential to understand that the burning point can occur at any given moment in the person's journey of recovery. One participant explains that they reached a burning point when they took responsibility and started defining themselves as a survivor:

"You can attend all counselling sessions, but if you think of yourself as a victim and have not accepted what happened and decided to move on, you won't heal. (Duma, Melwa and Berry 2008).







Duma explains that victims often struggle to reach a turning point due to the lack of family support (Duma, Mekwa and Benny 2008). Being controlled by people close to you also keep women from reaching a turning point. Duma refers to a participant who was pressured by her family to withdraw the charges against her rapist since it reflects poorly on her and them (Duma, Mekwa and Benny 2008). It is crucial to keep in mind that deciding or wanting to move on with one's life does not automatically mean it happens. This body of work holds a lot of my energy that longs for a mental space that will allow me to move on, to feel better. However, PTSD An important theme when regarding what was lost is to protect oneself. A self-protection strategy was reported as follows:

"A raped person needs to know that people understand and will not insult her about rape, but even if it is your mother, if you know that she will not understand and will insult you or blame you about it, then protect yourself and never tell her if need be" (Duma, Mekwa and Benny 2008).

Duma's study ran over six months. It was found that after this period, the participants were not ready for closure; however, some of the participants described their longing for closure. The study concluded that most women have 'readiness for closure' however, when anything happens that

does not always allow for that. Common symptoms of PTSD include intrusive thoughts and distressing recollections of the assault, as well as nightmares and other sleep disturbances (Boyd 2011).

The next category is 'reclaiming what was lost'. Duma explains that this category includes recognition, acknowledgement, and mourning of aspects of oneself that were lost during rape (Duma, Mekwa and Benny 2008). For example one participant in Duma's study said:

"...I would tell him that he killed a part of me..." (Duma, Mekwa and Benny 2008).







remotely resembles the events of rape, they get triggered, and the vivid memories of the crime are brought back with all the emotion it holds (Duma, Mekwa and Denny 2008). Some participants questioned the possibility of closure:

"I can't say I have fully reached closure because I would not know how it feels to be fully recovered." (Duma, Mekwa and Denny 2008)

Duma explains that the next concept, "returning to self" include participants defining themselves as a survivor or "old" self rather than as victims, wanting their lives back and acknowledging that they will always experience triggers that remind them

of the event of rape (Duma, Mekwa and Denny 2008). for example:

"Having said that, I don't mean the same person, as if nothing had happened to me. I mean, all these people treated me as if I were the same person, but I also know that I am a different person now. I have learnt lessons of being near death and coming back. I am a survivor" (Duma, Mekwa and Denny 2008)

Still exploring the idea of an 'old self', Nicola Gavry and Johann Schmidt studied the impact of rape and found that interviewees expressed that the rape trauma goes right to the core of your wellbeing and sense of self. interviewees explained that the rapist entered your mind





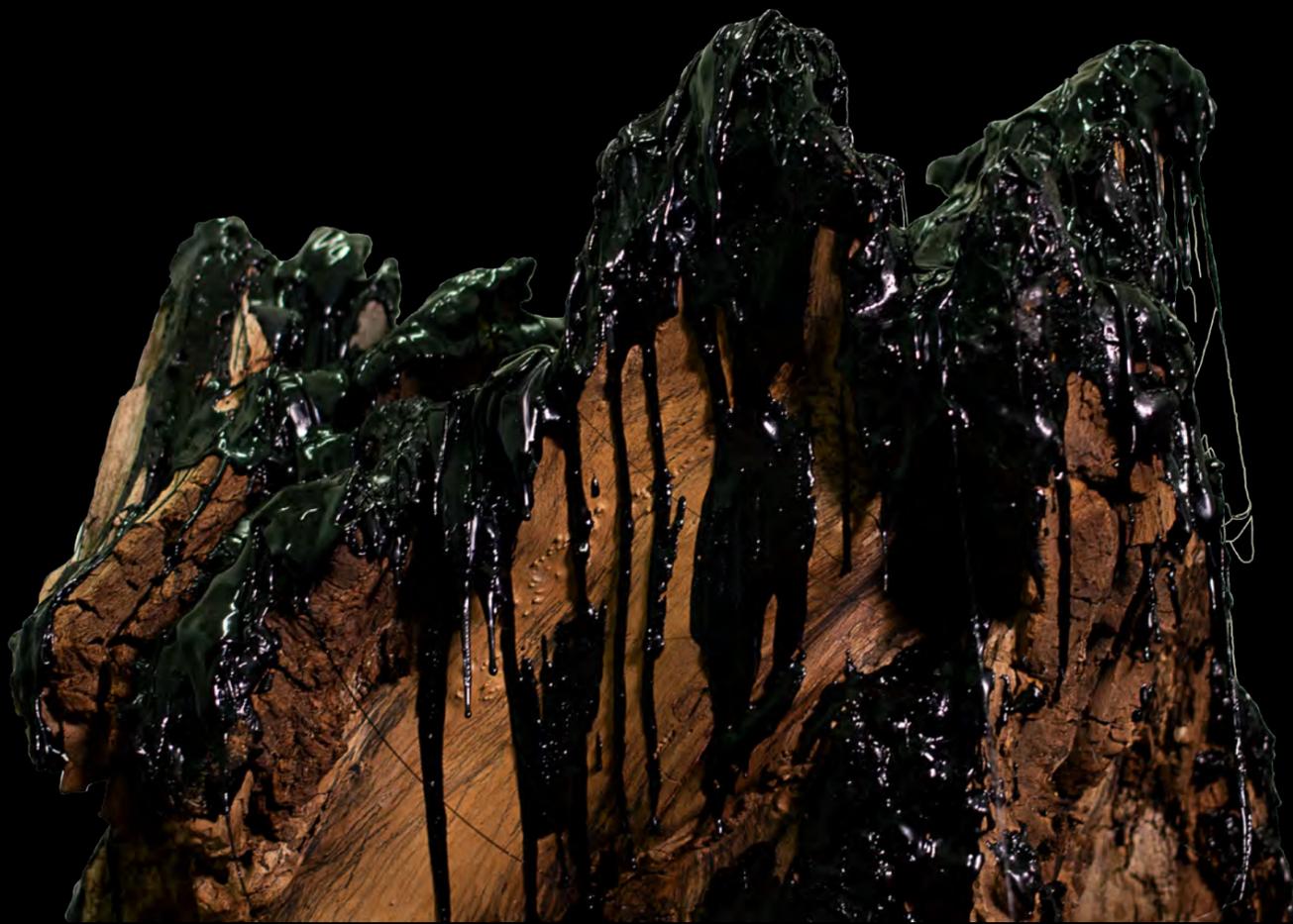
sacred place. The study found that the participants believed that the 'old self' no longer exists and that there is no going back (Garey and Schmidt 2001). The aftermath of rape trauma consists of unfathomably deep scars on the core being of the victim. Shonda Rhimes writes:

"No matter how hard we work at it, some wounds might never fully heal. You might have to adjust to a whole new way of living. Things might have changed too radically to ever go back to the way they were. You might not even recognise yourself" (Rhimes, 2011).

The idea of a lost 'old self' is an essential concept in this body of work. "Into the Night Forest" aims to create the confused and lost environment that I, and other victims of rape, find ourselves in after the event of rape. ~~That~~ This body of work is a visual representation of the longing for the familiarity of yourself. In Duma's conclusion, she reveals that she hopes that her study leads to further discoveries around the experiences and needs of women who suffer after rape. I, too, hope to do that with this body of work.

When I first read the second text vital to my work, "treating the trauma of Rape: Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy for PTSD", I got sick to my stomach, not because of the horrid reality but because I understood it. Within the first month post-assault, 27% of victims express suicidal tendencies. This number increases to 50% between 1 and 16 years after the event of rape (Foa and Rothbaum 1998). These statistics show how the idea of recovery might just be an idea for some victims. Functioning in life after the event of rape offers to be a great challenge. There does not always have a light at the end of the tunnel.

This text unpacks the diagnosis and prevalence of PTSD following the event of rape by looking at dissociation and numbing. After trauma, cognitive avoidance is often referred to as dissociation, denial, or numbing (Horowitz, n.d.). These constructs are a diminished awareness of a person's emotions or thoughts motivated by self-preservation (Foa and Rothbaum 1998). Foa and Rothbaum explain that these symptoms include amnesia, emotional detachment, feelings of depersonalisation, out-of-body experiences, feelings of estrangement, and flashbacks (Foa and Rothbaum 1998). It is difficult to explain in words what it is like to live with these symptoms. Therefore, "Into the Night Forest" attempts to explain these experiences in a manner that is beyond language.



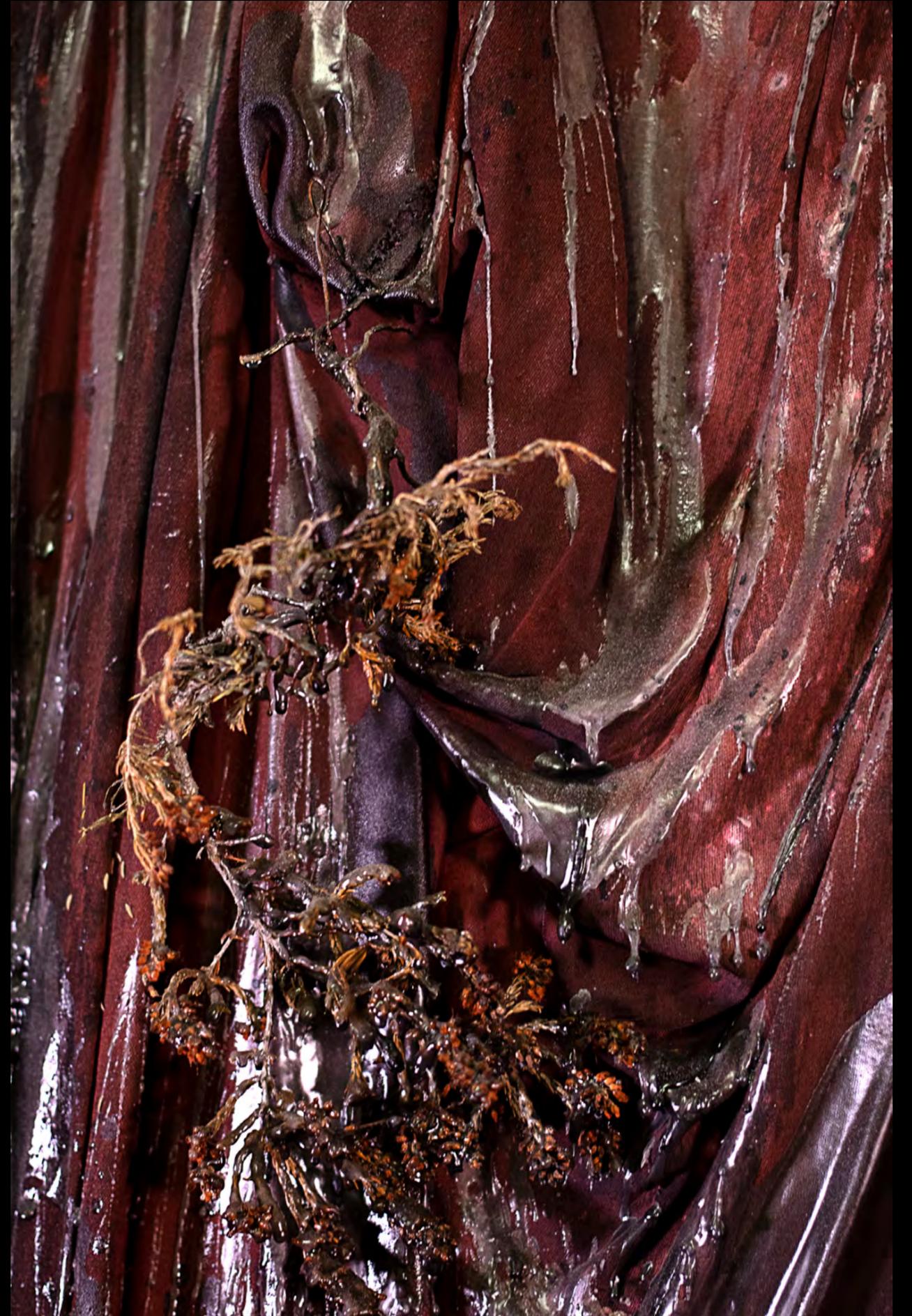


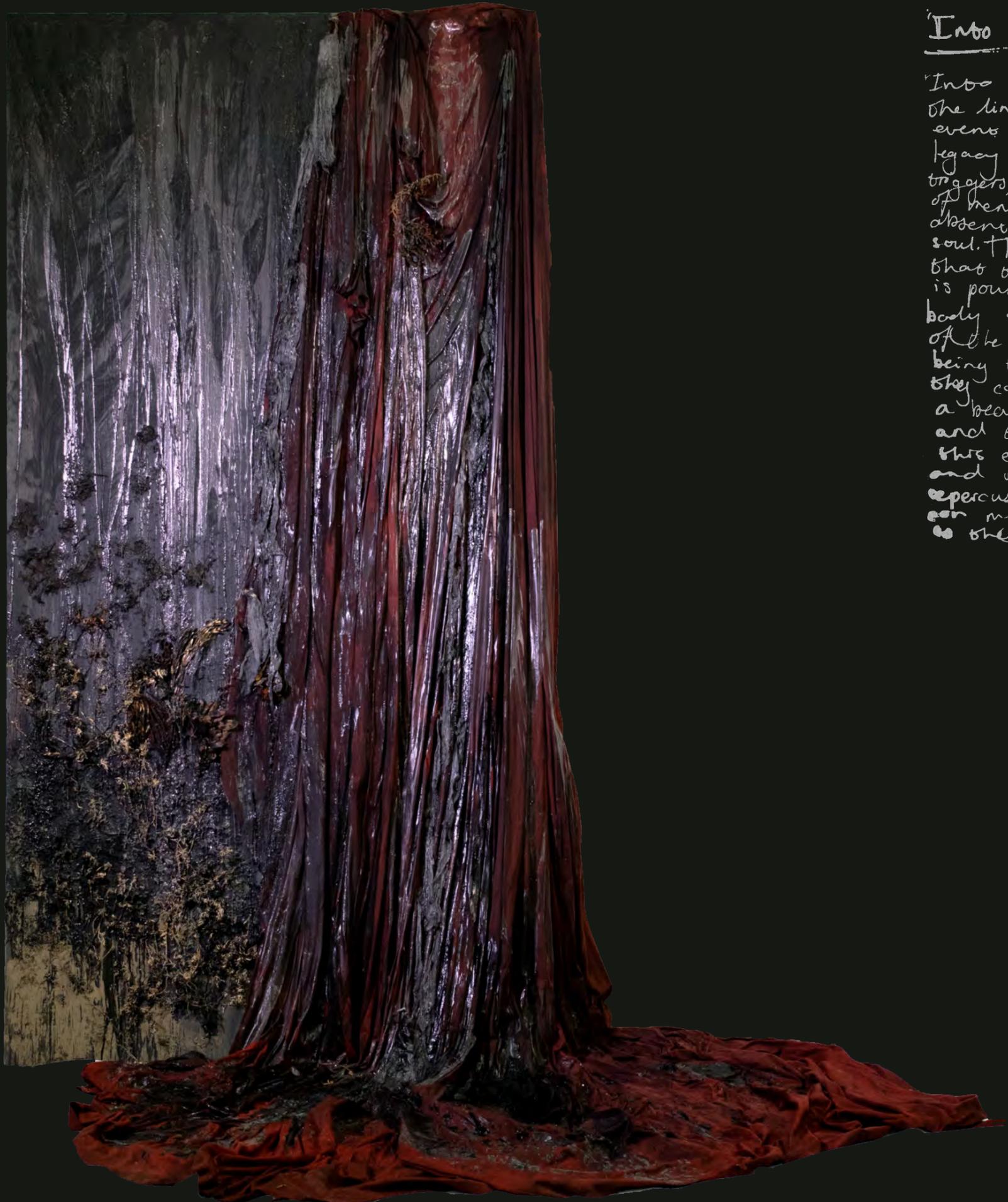




Rape Trauma Syndrome (RTS) can be characterized by disorganization lasting several hours, or even weeks (Foa and Rothbaum 1998). RTS include impact reactions such as disbelief and somatic reactions such as physical trauma (Foa and Rothbaum 1998). ~~It~~ It is depicted as a long-term process of changes and long-term chronic disturbances (Foa and Rothbaum 1998). The most common and permanent reactions after the event of rape are the intense fears of rape-related situations, ~~and~~ overwhelming anxiety (Atkeson, et al. 1982). Anxiety as a result of rape is found or last up to 16 years after the event of rape (Atkeson, et al. 1982).







'Into the Night Forest, 2021'

'Into the Night Forest' explores the liminal space after the events of rape. It unpacks the legacy of rape by looking at triggers, memories, and the lack of memories, the idea of an absent body and the absent soul. The turmoil of emotion that the daily flashbacks evoke is poured into my art. My body of work is a combination of the broken pieces of a person being thrown together - and when they come together, they create a beautiful melody of pain and trauma. My aim for this exhibition was to explore and visually represent the repercussion of rape trauma based on my own experience as well as the research mentioned.

Violation of the body is intimately connected to a person's sense of self. The aim of this body of work is not to address the event of rape but rather to express the space of "being" after the traumatic event.

"Into the Night Forest" aims to contribute to the research of rape victims after the event of rape. This compilation of work was created over seven months and reflects the emotional space I found myself in after the event of rape during this time. The compilation of work stands as a visual representation of rape trauma and aim to create an environment that is beyond language. "Into the Night Forest" explores the liminal space of victims that





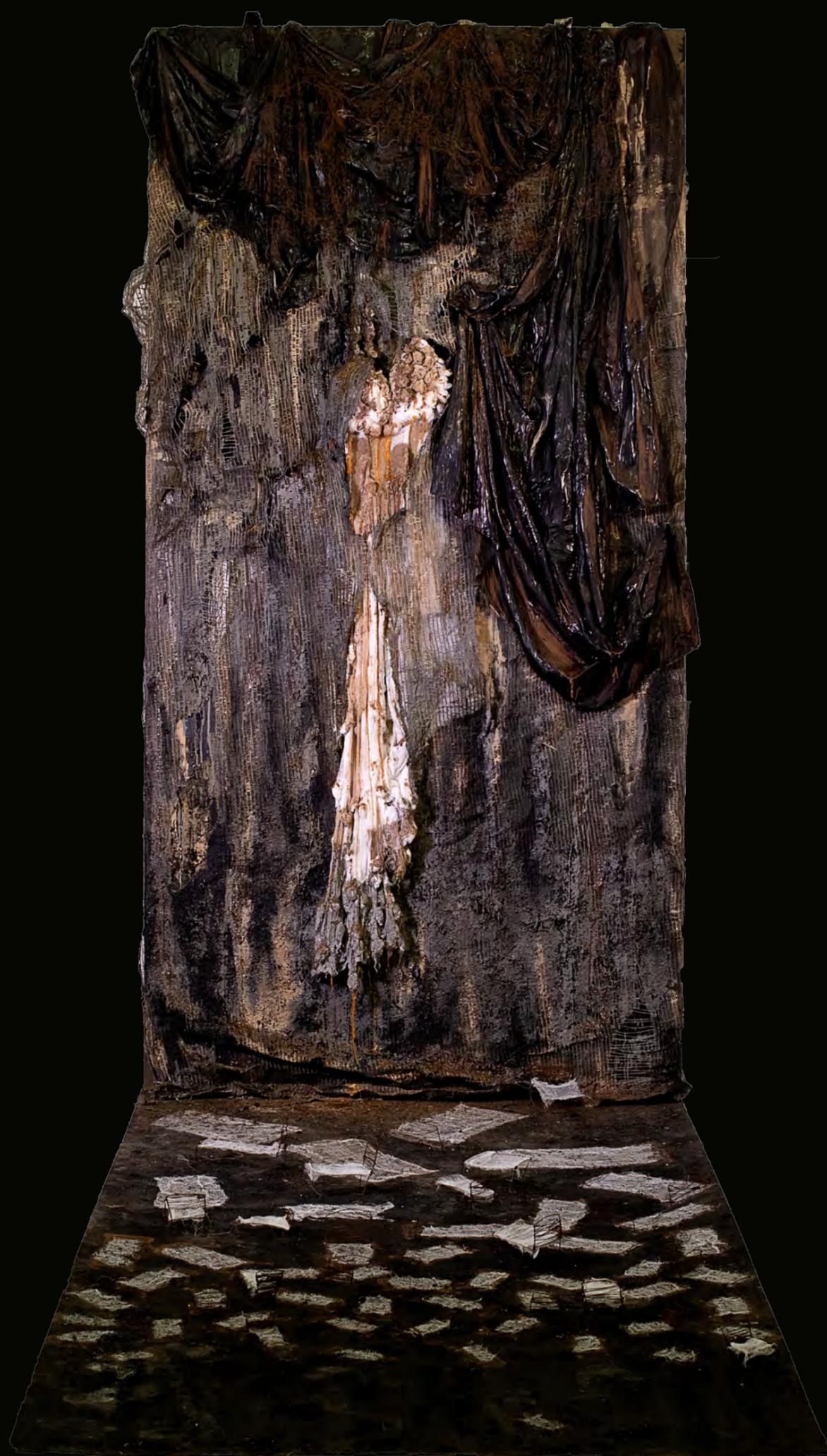
try to live a life after the
events of rape. Duma's study
explained that a rape victim's
greatest longing is to return to
their "old self". However, the
gushing truth is that the "old
self" no longer exists. "Into
the Night Forest" expresses
how I have, for over a year,
longed for myself every day.
It explores the act of transition
ing from an "old self" to now,
from a place of being to a
liminal space. These paintings
and sculptures represent the
terror and betrayal that some
victims live with and how it steals
more and more away from
themselves.







The paintings in conversation with the sculptures are big, overwhelming, and overpowering like the space a rape victim might find themselves in after the event of rape. The materials used in this body of work could all tell their own story. I focused a lot of my time exploring and experimenting with different materials. I got to know the materials I used, their history, how they fit in my life, what I can do with them and lastly, what they do to me. Different materials are layered in the sculptural paintings. The layering speaks to the covering up of the trauma, the lack of recognition, the dominant notion of not sharing the trauma. In some of the paintings, charcoal layers fall on top of the







the inner movement of the paint. In others, the viewer will never be able to access what is hidden under layers of paint, wax, sawdust, or bed-sheets. Growing up in an Afrikaner home, there is no space to discuss mental illness, distress, and "embarrassing" subjects such as rape or the aftermath of rape. It is covered with a smothering blanket and expected to die by itself.

The paintings and sculptures are loaded with emotions of anxiety, depression, and hopelessness; themes discussed in the research section earlier. My body of work seems a bit off. It is disrupted, out of place and loaded with personal triggers. I often found myself thinking that the paintings are too pretty,

before disturbing the paintings. Mediums used in the paintings include acrylic paint, wax, sawdust, sand, gauze, cardboard, bed sheets, duvet covers, charcoal, pastels, wire, plastic matter and prints. The sculptures are sculpted out of wax, plaster, gauze, cement, wire, bar, metal, wood and found objects. The combination of these materials found in the sculptures and paintings creates objects that might be fragile but dangerous. They might lure the viewer to look at the detail but quickly create a wall that keeps everyone out that might harm them.

Wax is a common material found in my art. Even though wax holds some trauma history in my life, the main reason I chose to work with wax is not because of the



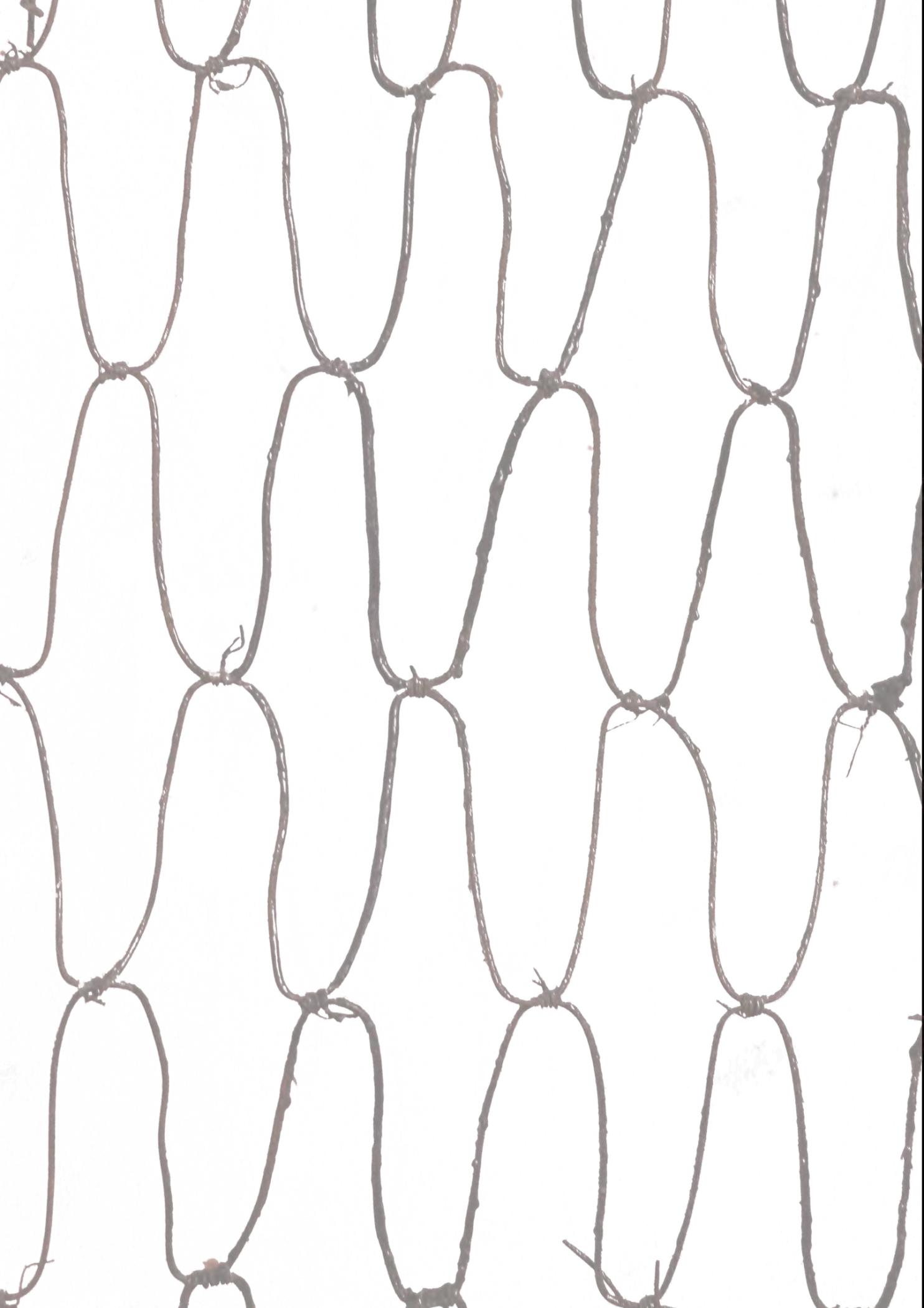


material itself but rather the visual effect of the material. I mixed the wax with crayons to change the color of the wax. The way in some artworks hints at an object body-like representation. In other sculptural paintings it represents the state of mental paralysis I experience even long after the event of rape. Wax is used throughout most of the paintings and adds to the layering and covering of information.

Most of the artworks include plant matter or references to nature. The history of ~~plants~~ botanicals run deep in my family. My grandmother has saved a flower guide which I use to identify plants. A

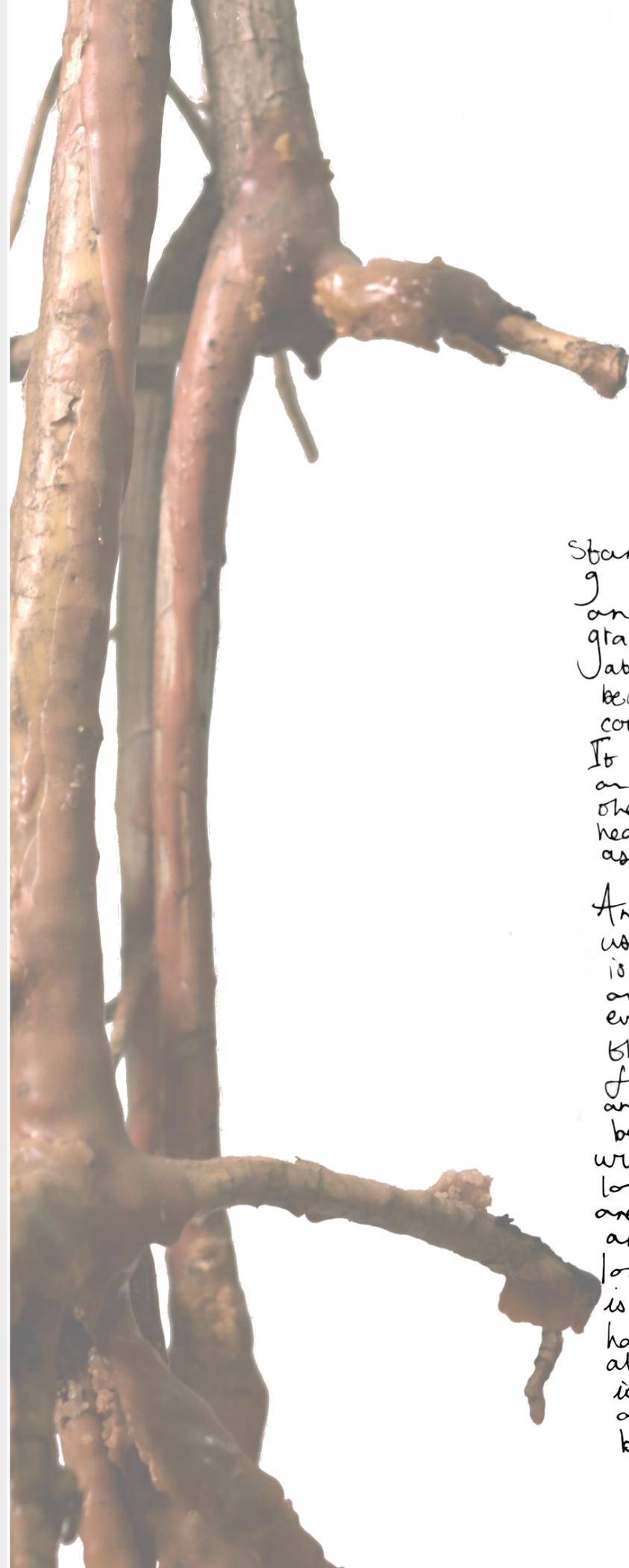
lot of the plant matter was collected on my father's farm. The presence of these plants in my art refers to my strict Afrikaner upbringing. It speaks to how painful events had to be suppressed, and all that the world is allowed to see is 'beautiful flowers'. One significant plant I used in ~~to~~ my work is called "Ondbos," the Afrikaans translation for 'oven bush' or 'baking bush'. 'Ondbos' was used in households to sweep and clean ovens. One can also make tea from it, which can cure the flu, fever, and heart conditions (Renu-ikaro veld Restoration n.d.). When I











Started this body of work, I looked at the medicinal and poisonous plants in my grandmother's book. I looked at the idea that these beautifully painted plants could hurt or help someone. It could hurt me and save an animal. I linked this to the idea I constructed in my head of the person who assaulted me.

Another common material used in this body of work is bedsheets. Bedsheets have an obvious connection to the events of rape; however, I used them as objects that smother feelings. It links to depression and the idea of covering. The bedsheets are often smothered with paint or wax. They lose their quality to move. They are locked into position. They are hardened. They can no longer serve their purpose and is bound up in materials that harden or protect them. It is almost like a rape victim whose identity and purpose are lost and covered with scars and boundaries to protect them.



Acknowledgements:

with thanks to Leri Seark
for the guidance throughout
the year.

Gretchen van der Byl for
finding words for something
that is beyond language.

Mc Gladen for all the
time spent to make this
exhibition a reality.

My family and especially
Janice van Heerden for giving
me the opportunity to study
and for all the support.

Dr Louis Blond for all the
honest feedback and investment
in my art.

Duncan Meyer for teaching me
the skills to solve any technical
problem that might come my
way.

Charles van Reyers for all
the assistance.

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“Into the Night Forest, 2021”

Klaré van Heerden

It is a well-known fact that rape victims suffer horrific trauma during the event of rape. However, the lasting effect of rape trauma is lesser-known. Dr Rothbaum explains that a month after rape, 27% of rape victims have suicidal tendencies. 1-16 years after the event of rape, this number increases to 50%. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) caused by rape is often more intense and more challenging to live with. With limited knowledge about the horrid lasting effect of rape trauma, this body of work contributes as research to our understanding of what victims suffer through after the event of rape. This body of work aims to create a space where victims can be heard and a space to bring the unfathomable reality of the lives of victims into the light.

This installation explores the liminal space after the event of rape. It explores the PTSD symptoms caused by rape, such as; depression, dissociation, mental paralysis, anxiety, feeling trapped, feeling lost, and guilt. It furthermore explores the liminal space of victims that try to live a life after the event of rape, the same way they used to live before the event of rape. Sinegugu E. Duma's study explains that a rape victim's greatest longing is to return to their "old self". However, the gushing truth is that the "old self" no longer exists. My exhibition expresses how I have, for over a year, longed for myself every day. It explores the act of transitioning from an "old self" to now. This body of work explores the lasting legacy of rape by looking at triggers, memories and the lack of memories, the idea of an absent body, absent soul. The emotion that the daily flashbacks evoke is poured into my art. The art is a combination of broken pieces of a person thrown together. And when they come together, they create a beautiful melody of pain and trauma.

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