

M A S K A N

AN ART INSTALLATION ON FEMICIDE IN KENYA

CURATED BY THAYÛ



USIKOMYE!

HEINRICH BÖLL STIFTUNG
NAIROBI
Kenya | Uganda | Tanzania

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An Art Installation on Femicide in Kenya

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Creative's
Garage

USIKOMYE!

HEINRICH BÖLL STIFTUNG
KALRODI
Kalenje | Kisumu | Siaya

Installation Title: MASKAN 2

Produced by: Usikimye & Creatives Garage

Curated by: Thayù

Curation team: Wanjiku Koinange, Jebet Mwende, Njoki Kimwaki, Steve Collins, Juelz Laval, Rahab Goko, Rosemary Mwangi, Barlon Murimi, Evaline Atieno, Faith Mukami, Margaret Otieno, Lyn Onywere, Hadassah Neema, Harun Wandabwa, Harrison Njoroge, David Gitau, David Ochieng, Lawrence Gataka, Nelly Keya, Adam Ahsan

Installation and Sound Design: Thayù

Special Thanks to all the survivors, families, supporters, and every voice that refuses to be silenced.

In memory of the women and children we have lost to femicide in Kenya.



One year ago , we asked what happened when the four walls meant to protect us crumble into sites of violence. Yet again we stand inside this reimagined space with an equally heavier perhaps more agonizing question. Why hasn't Femicide changed?

Here , at Maskan we ask you not to look away. These are not statistics, not numbers on a report. Here we have names, missing pieces. Here we ask you to pause and see dreams and lives untold, shattered.

We are exhausted from waking up to yet another headline, another body. We are tired of hollow promises of institutions that watch women die and

do nothing. We refuse for our grief to be quiet.

This exhibition is not a passive gallery of tragedy. It's an act of resistance. I hope MASKAN compels you to step out of your comfort zone.

May we never stop speaking their names and until we rebuild this country home means safety again and Kenya is home.

Stop killing Women.....End Femicide

Njeri



MASKAN II

Artist Statement

Today is 21st July 2026.

Yesterday we premiered the documentary we made about the first MASKAN exhibition. Halfway through the screening, I wanted to leave.

Not because the film wasn't good (I mean, my multi-talented team made it). I'd watched it countless times while editing. I knew every frame, every cut, every interview. But sitting in a cinema, surrounded by other people watching these stories unfold, I realised I hadn't actually processed everything we had lived through.

I just wanted to get up and walk out. MASKAN began almost by accident. My friend Njeri came to me in 2025 with the idea of creating an exhibition on femicide. I said no. More than once. Eventually I said yes, mostly because 2025 somehow became my year of saying yes to things that scared me.

Wueh! I had no idea I was walking into one of the hardest journeys of my life.

The plan was simple. Create something small, show it for one week, close and move on.

One week became three. Then another exhibition in Nairobi. Then another. Then we travelled to counties across Kenya carrying these stories with us. Somewhere along the way, MASKAN stopped being a project. It became something I carried home every evening.

People often ask what the hardest part was.

It wasn't building the installations. It wasn't the long nights. It wasn't even the logistics.

It was spending months immersed in stories of women and children whose lives ended far too soon. Reading case

after case. Listening to families speak about people they loved in the past tense. Writing stories for people who could no longer tell their own. Recording sound. Editing interviews. Saying victims' names over and over until they stopped being statistics and became people I somehow felt I knew.

Every name belonged to someone. Someone who laughed. Someone who had plans for next week.

Someone who thought they were going home.

By the end of MASKAN in 2025, I had visited my therapist more times than I care to admit. I cried myself to sleep more nights than I would like to remember. It remains one of the most difficult things I have ever made.

I honestly thought that would be the end of it.

But MASKAN came back.

Because women are still being killed.

Children are still disappearing.

The stories haven't stopped, so neither could the work.

This year we've written a report on femicide, expanded the exhibition, created a feature-length documentary and made Maria, a short film about a woman who hides bruises beneath flawless makeup before walking into work every morning.

When I first wrote Maria, she felt like fiction. Then she stopped feeling fictional. I started seeing her everywhere. In restaurants. In offices. At supermarkets. Women smiling, working, laughing, carrying something unimaginable behind closed doors.

Making Maria took something out of me. There were days when I'd spend hours directing scenes of violence, drive home in complete silence, then open my phone only to find another

headline about another woman who
hadn't survived.

The work never really ended.
That's what people don't tell you
about making work like this.
You don't leave it at the studio.
It comes home with you.

It sits beside you while you're having
dinner.
It wakes you up at three in the
morning.
It follows you into ordinary moments.
As I build MASKAN II, I've realised
I'm still carrying 2025.

I find myself crying at unexpected
moments. Breaking down over the
smallest things. Feeling waves of
anger that come from nowhere.
Sometimes panic. Sometimes com-
plete exhaustion.

And underneath all of it is one ques-
tion that keeps repeating itself.
WHY?????

Why are women still being killed?
Why are children still disappearing?
What more could we have done?
What more can I do?

Sometimes I wonder whether art
chooses us because MASKAN
certainly chose me.

When I began, I thought I was creat-
ing an exhibition about femicide.
Instead, it became an exhibition
about memory.

About unfinished futures.
About refusing to let people disap-
pear twice; first through violence,
then through forgetting.

Every installation in MASKAN II
comes from that place. A wedding
dress that never reaches its happy
ending. An empty courtroom where
justice never arrived. School uni-
forms waiting for children who will
never wear them again. WhatsApp
conversations that suddenly stop.
Thousands of blank sheets repre-

senting lives interrupted. Names
hanging above us, asking only one
thing:

Please remember me.

I don't know if art changes the world.

Some days, after reading another

headline, I'm not sure it does but I do

know this. Art can make us stop.

It can make us look someone in the
eye instead of looking away.

It can make us remember a name
instead of a number.

And... maybe, just maybe, that's

where change begins.

Thayn

If you or anyone you know has been affected by Gender Based Violence
and/or Femicide and is in need of help contact

USIKIMYE FREE HELPLINE

0800 000 999

FREE · 24 HOURS · CONFIDENTIAL



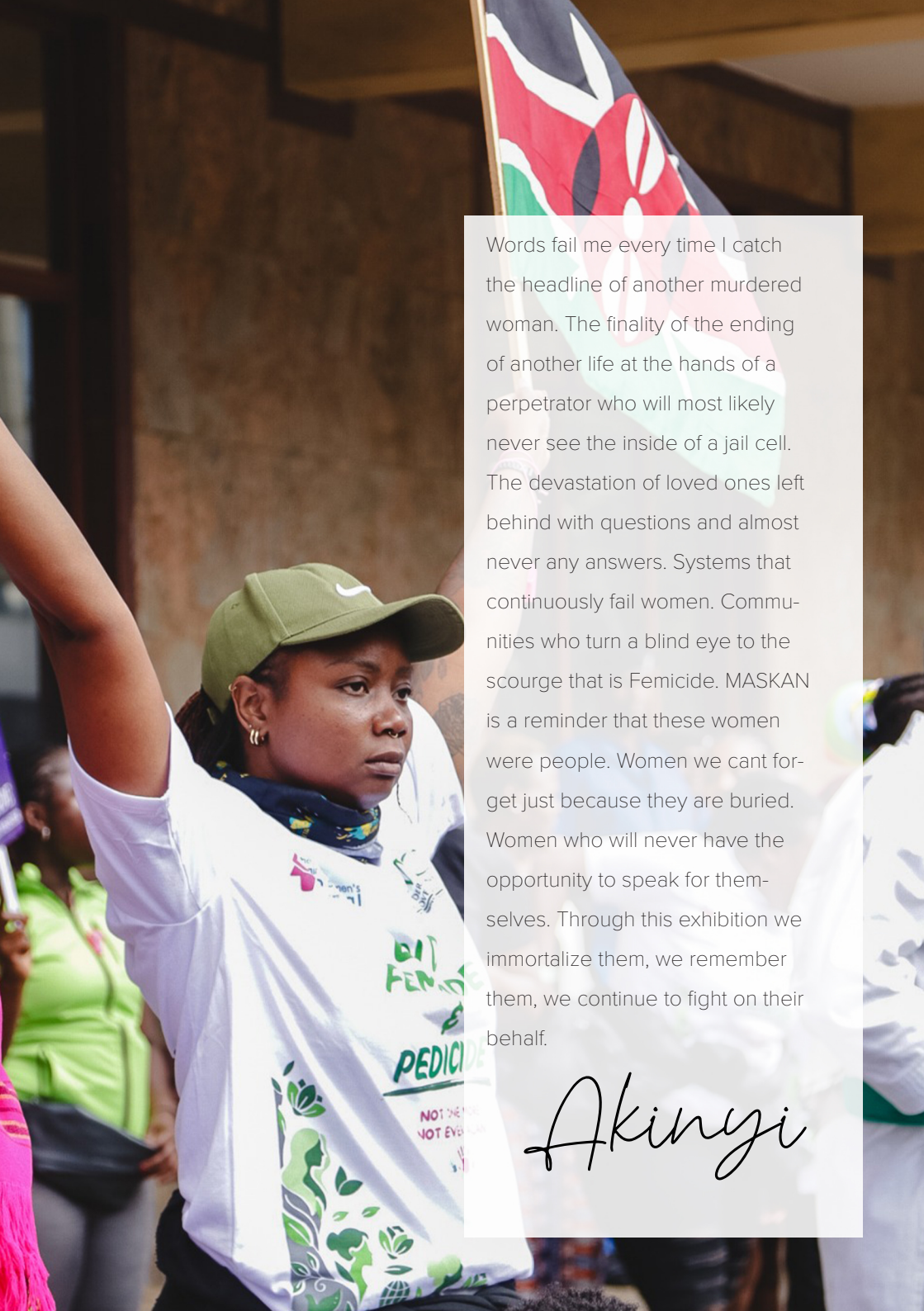
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Words fail me every time I catch the headline of another murdered woman. The finality of the ending of another life at the hands of a perpetrator who will most likely never see the inside of a jail cell. The devastation of loved ones left behind with questions and almost never any answers. Systems that continuously fail women. Communities who turn a blind eye to the scourge that is Femicide. MASKAN is a reminder that these women were people. Women we cant forget just because they are buried. Women who will never have the opportunity to speak for themselves. Through this exhibition we immortalize them, we remember them, we continue to fight on their behalf.

Akingi

ABOUT

How do we remember those whose lives were interrupted before they had the chance to become memory?

MASKAN II inhabits the fragile space between absence and presence. It is an archive of what remains after violence: names without voices, conversations without

replies, clothes waiting for bodies, courtrooms waiting for justice, and futures suspended in time.

Emerging from years of artistic research into femicide and the disappearance of children in Kenya, the exhibition refuses the distance often created by statistics. Instead, it gathers fragments of



**GENDER
DESK**

ordinary lives; the intimate, the domestic, the unfinished and places them before us as acts of remembrance. Here, memory becomes material. Sound lingers where words have failed. Objects become witnesses. Empty spaces carry the weight of those who are no longer able to occupy them.

The exhibition does not seek to reconstruct the violence itself. Rather, it examines what violence leaves behind: silence, bureaucracy, grief, interrupted rituals, and the quiet persistence of those who continue to remember. Visitors move through an evolving landscape of installation, moving image, sound, text, and participation, where the boundaries between memorial, archive, and

contemporary artwork dissolve.

MASKAN II understands remembrance as an active practice. To remember is to resist disappearance. To speak a name is to challenge erasure. To bear witness is to refuse indifference.

There are no complete answers here. Only an invitation to remain with what is difficult, to confront the ordinary ways in which lives become headlines, and to consider how societies remember or choose not to remember those lost to violence.

In MASKAN II, memory is not the conclusion of a life.



Kalabars

P R E S E N T S

Dian...
Dorik...
Edda...
Edidah...
Edinas...
Edna...
Elizabeth...
Elizabeth...
Elizabeth...
Elvinah...
Emaily...
Emily...
Mitei...
Esther...



M A S K A N

D O C U M E N T A R Y

CURATED AND DIRECTED BY THAYU EXECUTIVE PRODUCED BY NJERI MIGWI, THAYÜ, HEINRICH BÖLL STIFTUNG PRODUCED BY STEVE COLLINS, CAMERA BARLON MURIMI, SHALOM MWENESI, LAWRENCE GICHU EDITED BY BARLON MURIMI SOUND PRODUCER SANTURI, BARLON MURIMI, SAMSON NG'ANG'A, SHEILA WAIRIMU ADDITIONAL INTERVIEW BY IAN WAFULA ADDITIONAL FOOTAGE TIZIKA, CJP FILMS



Kalabars

P R E S E N T S

MARIA

WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY THAYU | PRODUCED BY STEVE COLLINS | FEATURING LORNA LEMI, EMMANUEL MUGO
SHOT BY VICTOR 'REMY' MWANGI | SOUND BY NJUGUNA OTIS | PHOTOGRAPHY BARLON MURIMI |
STUNTS BY EMMANUEL MUGO | MAKE-UP BY ACE OF HAIR

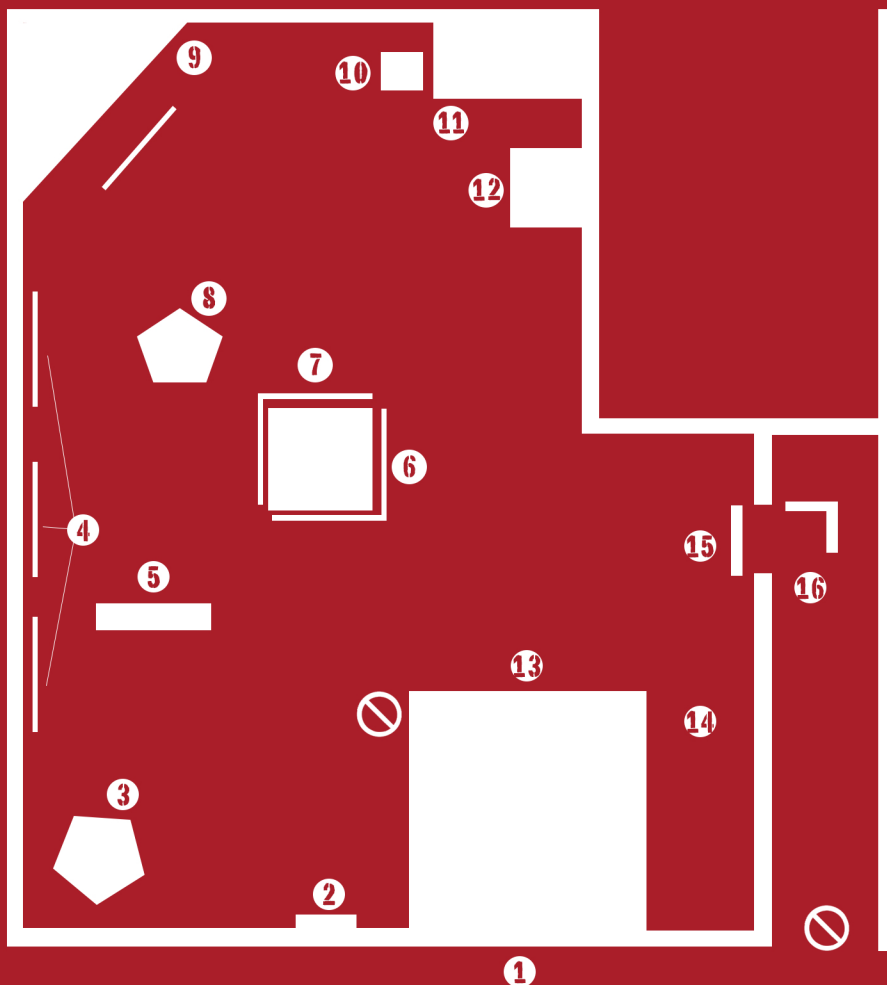


USIKOME!

HEINRICH BÖLL STIFTUNG
NAIROBI
Kampai | Uspahia | Tanzania

THAYU

INSTALLATION WALKTHROUGH





1. In my thoughts

"When will you get married?"

"When will you have children?"

"He's too short."

"He's too tall."

"He's too handsome."

"He's not handsome enough."

"You're too fat."

"You're too thin."

"You're getting too old."

The world always seems to have an opinion about how a woman should live her life. The pressure is relentless. Sometimes it is confusing. Sometimes it is exhausting.

Sometimes it convinces you to stay in an abusive relationship because that's what the pastor said, because that's what society expects, because that's what a good wife does.

The voices grow louder until they drown out your own.

And then, when everything falls apart, the questions change.

"Why didn't you leave?"

"Why did you let this happen to you?"

The same society that taught women to endure is often the first to ask why they stayed.

2. Rites of Passage

"I'm getting older."

"I need to have children."

"Things will get better once we're married."

These are the stories many women grow up hearing. They become milestones we are expected to reach, often without questioning who created them or who benefits from them.

Rites of Passage explores the expectations placed on women through the institution of marriage. The white wedding dress represents the ideal of purity and the promise of a perfect union, an image society continues to uphold.

Wrapped around it, the red rope symbolizes the pressure women are expected to carry: the expectation to endure, to remain, to sacrifice, and to keep the marriage together no

matter the cost.

The red roses speak to the blood that has been shed behind closed doors, the lives interrupted, the dreams abandoned, and the violence too often hidden beneath the celebration of “happily ever after.”

3. The WhatsApp Archive

Imagine never knowing that the message you just sent would be your last.

Or that the notification lighting up your phone would be the final message you would ever receive from someone you love.

The WhatsApp Archive is a collection of conversations interrupted. Ordinary messages about groceries, dinner plans, school pick-ups, missed calls, and “I’m on my way home” become extraordinary when there is no reply. The installation reminds us that none of us knows when an everyday conversation will become an archive.

It is a portrait of lives that were once full of laughter, plans, arguments, affection, and hope, people who were here, who were deeply loved, and who left behind families searching through messages for one last connection.

In the end, what remains are not just words on a screen, but the devastating proof that someone was here.

4. Who Will Save Me?

We are taught that home is where we are safest. That the people who love us will protect us. That the hands reaching for us are hands we can trust.

But for many victims of femicide, the greatest danger comes from someone they know. A partner. A husband. A father. A relative. A colleague. A friend.

Who Will Save Me? confronts the painful reality that the very hands meant to offer comfort, protection, and love can become the source of

violence. It asks what happens when trust is weaponized, when the familiar becomes frightening, and when the place that should feel safest becomes the most dangerous.

Who do you turn to when the hands that should save you are the very hands you need saving from?

out by outrage.

For victims and their families, the violence does not end at the scene of the crime. It continues online, in victim-blaming, public judgment, and relentless speculation, leaving new wounds long after the headlines fade.

5. Social Media

It begins with a profile picture, a friend request, and the excitement of connecting with people. A space created to share memories, celebrate milestones, and build community.

But somewhere along the way, the timeline changes.

Social Media explores the digital spaces where cruelty has become casual and anonymity emboldens hate. Behind screens, keyboard cowards weaponize words, harass strangers, shame victims, spread misinformation, and turn human tragedy into entertainment. Every comment, every repost, every laughing emoji contributes to a culture where empathy is too often drowned

6. 10581

10,581 children. Fifteen months. Each sheet of paper in this installation represents a child who has gone missing.

Some are still being searched for. Some were found too late, their small bodies discarded as though their lives did not matter. Others remain names on posters, faces on social media, and empty spaces at family dinner tables.

10,581 is a visual reminder of a crisis that is difficult to comprehend. One sheet of paper is easy to overlook. Thousands become overwhelming. Together, they reveal the scale of absence, grief, and unanswered questions carried by families across

Kenya.

This work is dedicated to the estimated 17 to 23 children reported missing every day; children who should be in classrooms, on playgrounds, and safely at home, not becoming statistics.

When every piece of paper is a child, how many pages must we count before we decide enough is enough?

7. Letters to My Future Self

Imagine how quickly my life was taken away.

Now imagine everything I never got to do.

The places I wanted to visit. The dreams I was still building. The person I was slowly becoming. The conversations I never had. The hugs I never gave. The birthdays I never celebrated.

I never got to finish my favourite series. I never got to tell my family I loved them one last time. I never got to cook that meal I had been looking

forward to making. I never got to become the future version of myself I had imagined.

A life is not only measured by how it ends, but by everything it was meant to become.

Mine was taken away before I had the chance.

8. I Am Just a Child

I am just a child. I love to play with my friends, chase imaginary adventures, and dream up worlds that only children can see. I should be worrying about homework, scraped knees, birthdays, and what I want to be when I grow up.

Instead, some children meet violence in the very places meant to keep them safe at home, on the streets, on their way to school, or hidden away in places no child should ever be found.

I Am Just a Child is a reminder that every child deserves the chance to grow, to dream, and to become. Every life taken is not only a child lost, but a future stolen; a teacher, an

artist, a scientist, a parent, a leader who will never have the opportunity to exist.

9. The Court of Silence

Justice is often measured in years. Grief is measured every day. Some cases make it to court. Some are delayed for years. Others grow cold before a judge ever hears them. Many never see the light of day at all.

The Court of Silence reflects on a justice system where time itself becomes another form of punishment. Court proceedings can take an average of four to six years from formal accusation to judgment, excluding appeals. Four to six years of waiting. Four to six years of unanswered questions. Four to six years of birthdays, anniversaries, and empty chairs at the dinner table.

For families left behind, justice delayed is not just a legal process, it is a prolonged grief. Every postponed hearing, every missing file, every adjournment extends the silence, leaving loved ones suspended

between hope and heartbreak.

10. What Will They Say About You?

You are gone now.

The people you leave behind must carry what remains; the grief, the trauma, the unanswered questions, and the impossible task of learning how to live in a world without you. When someone is taken by violence, their story is too often told through police reports, court files, and newspaper headlines. But those who loved them remember something else. They remember the way they laughed, the songs they sang, the meals they cooked, the jokes they told, and the dreams they were still chasing.

What Will They Say About You? is an archive of remembrance. Through interviews with family members and loved ones, this installation creates space for those left behind to speak not about how someone died, but about how they lived. It restores names, memories, personalities, and love to people who are too often reduced to

statistics.

In the end, our lives are not measured by the headlines written about us, but by the stories the people who loved us continue to tell. If those who love you were asked to tell your story, what would they say?

11. Mwanamke ni Kuvumilia

“Mwanamke ni kuvumilia.”
A woman must endure.

It is a phrase many of us have heard for generations. Passed down as wisdom, offered as advice, repeated as comfort. But where does resilience end and silence begin?

Mwanamke ni Kuvumilia explores the violence that exists behind closed doors; the kind hidden by walls, disguised by smiles, and protected by the belief that enduring is a woman's duty. It is the violence neighbours suspect but rarely speak about, the bruises concealed beneath long sleeves, the cries muffled by the expectation to keep the family together.

At the heart of this installation is Maria, a short film that offers an intimate glimpse into a home where abuse has become ordinary. It asks us to witness not only the violence itself, but the silence that allows it to continue.

This room is an invitation to question the stories we have inherited. If endurance comes at the cost of a woman's life, is it still a virtue or has it become another form of violence?

12. Nyama Quarter

“Mama, I made it.”

Only not in the way you had hoped. You made it into the newspaper; your face beside a headline announcing your death. Another victim. Another statistic. You might have wished they had chosen a better photograph, but it hardly matters now.

Then, before the ink has even dried, the newspaper begins another life.

It is folded around a quarter kilo of meat at the butcher's. A stranger carries it home, unwraps the package, and without a second thought, crumples your story and throws it into the bin.

Just like that, your life becomes disposable.

Nyama Quarter confronts the unsettling ordinariness with which tragedy is consumed and forgotten. It asks us to consider how quickly public grief gives way to routine, how easily a life can be reduced to a headline, then to wrapping paper, and finally to rubbish.

A woman's story should never end in a dustbin.

When does forgetting become another act of violence?

13. We Refuse to Be Statistics

A number can tell us how many.
It can never tell us who.

Behind every statistic is a woman with a name, a family, a laugh, a favourite

song, dreams she had not yet fulfilled, and people who are still waiting for her to walk through the door.

We Refuse to Be Statistics is an act of remembrance. It rejects the language of numbers and restores the humanity of the women whose lives were taken by femicide. Here, they are not case files, headlines, or percentages. They are daughters, mothers, sisters, friends, colleagues, neighbours, and dreamers. They lived among us, loved among us, and were loved in return.

This installation invites us to remember them not for how they died, but for how they lived.

To speak their names.

To tell their stories.

To refuse the quiet disappearance that so often follows public outrage.

Because the moment we reduce a life to a statistic, we begin to forget the person. We refuse to let that happen.

14. Usikojoe Hapa

"Usikojoe Hapa."

“Do Not Urinate Here.”

It is a sign we pass every day without a second thought.

Yet for some victims, places meant to hold waste become the places where their bodies are hidden. Pit latrines, septic tanks, drainage channels, and abandoned dumps become silent graves, chosen not by chance, but in an attempt to erase both evidence and memory.

Usikojoe Hapa confronts the unimaginable indignity of being discarded as though a human life were no more valuable than rubbish. It asks us to reckon with the cruelty of a violence that seeks not only to end a life, but to erase its existence.

Every body recovered from such a place belonged to someone who laughed, dreamed, loved, and was deeply loved in return.

15. Njia ni Mawili

“Njia ni mawili.”

There are only two paths.

You unlock the door and step inside. It should be the place where you exhale, where you are safest, where the

day comes to an end.

But for some, crossing the threshold is a gamble.

Will you make it back out alive, or will you leave in a body bag?

Njia ni Mawili transforms an ordinary door into a silent witness. It has seen the arguments, the apologies, the fear, the moments of hope, and the violence that unfolds behind closed doors. If doors could speak, this one would tell stories of lives lived in survival, of neighbours who heard but looked away, and of victims who wondered if today would be the day they escaped or the day they didn't. The most dangerous place for many women is not a dark alley or an unfamiliar street. It is often the place they call home.

16. Mirror Without a Face

Imagine dying and becoming a headline.

A brief news alert. A few days of public outrage. A trending hashtag. Then another story arrives, and the country moves on.

Imagine reading, "Woman found dead." Not your name. Not your story. Just another anonymous victim.

But you had a name. You had a favourite meal, a laugh that people recognized, dreams you were still chasing, and people who loved you. Yet, in death, your identity is reduced to a statistic, your life slowly erased from public memory. We forget your face. We forget your voice. We forget who you were.

Mirror Without a Face invites visitors to confront that erasure. As you stand before the mirror, the reflection is no longer only your own. It becomes a reminder that behind every headline is a person whose life was as ordinary, complex, and hopeful as yours.

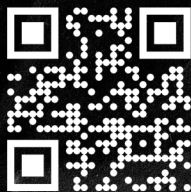
This could be your story. It could be mine. It could be someone you love. Now that you are here, what will you do to help ensure it never becomes one more headline?

ABOUT ARTIST

ThayÙ is a reclusive multidisciplinary artist, curator, and cultural strategist whose work moves across memory, resistance, and radical storytelling. Known for merging the digital with the deeply human, ThayÙ creates immersive experiences that confront erasure and hold space for truth.

In MASKAN, ThayÙ draws on their signature fusion of visual art, sound, scent, and lived histories to build a home where silence is broken and femicide is named. With a background in film, performance, XR, and social justice, their work invites audiences to feel deeply, remember fiercely, and leave transformed.

ThayÙ





USIKIMYE

“DON'T BE SILENT”

Our Mission is to end Gender Based Violence by delivering survivor centered , trauma informed services and driving community powered change in Kenya

Usikimye is a transformative force in Kenya, passionately committed to the eradication of gender-based violence (GBV) and femicide.

Rooted in survivor-centered, feminist, and trauma-informed principles, we prioritize the holistic well-being and empowerment of those we serve. We understand that healing requires more than immediate assistance; it demands systemic change. Therefore, our work encompasses:

Creating Safe Spaces: We establish secure and supportive environments where survivors can find refuge and begin their journey towards recovery.

Providing Essential Services: We offer comprehensive support, including counseling, legal aid, and practical resources, tailored to the unique needs of each survivor.

Advocating for Systemic Change: We actively challenge the deepseated patriarchal structures that perpetuate violence, pushing for policy reforms and societal shifts that promote equality and justice.

Usikimye believes in empowering survivors to reclaim their lives and voices. We are dedicated to building a future where every individual lives free from the fear and reality of violence



About Creatives Garage

We embrace both existing and emerging technologies to challenge existing narratives and showcase the richness and diversity of African cultures through storytelling. Operating on the ethos of a community reminiscent of a typical African village, Creatives Garage cultivates a thriving community and builds a robust ecosystem for artists to connect, Learn, share ideas, collaborate, create new works, gain market access and push boundaries.

Over the past thirteen years, Creatives Garage has grown into a powerful multidisciplinary arts organization, supporting over 15,000 creatives

across disciplines such as film, theatre, publishing, podcasting, photography, XR, music, and AI. We operate on the principle of a modern African village; collaborative, inclusive, and community-rooted, where creators connect, learn, co-create, and thrive. Through training, collaborative productions, and market access, we empower artists to grow creatively and economically, becoming active contributors to Kenya's creative economy. From publishing books to producing podcasts, creating films, and exploring virtual worlds, we embrace both traditional and emerging technologies to push the boundaries of African storytelling. Our work sparks dialogue, challenges dominant narratives, and celebrates the richness and complexity of African cultures. At Creatives Garage, we center radical creativity, cultural expression, and social impact, using art as a tool for empowerment, advocacy, and transformation.

READ MORE



About Heinrich-Böll- Stiftung (hbs)

The Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung (hbs), a non-profit organisation, is part of the global Green movement headquartered in Berlin Germany. HBS tenets are anchored on Ecology and Sustainability, Democracy and Human Rights, self-determination and Justice. We place particular emphasis on gender democracy, meaning social emancipation and equal rights for all genders. The hbs Nairobi Office, opened in 2001 focusing on Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. The hbs Nairobi office programme seeks to advance

progressive political and socio-economic transformation through its thematic focus on Sustainable Development, Gender Democracy, Dialogue and Civic Spaces, Agroecology and Food Rights.

**“Meddling is the
only way to stay
relevant”**

-Heinrich Boell

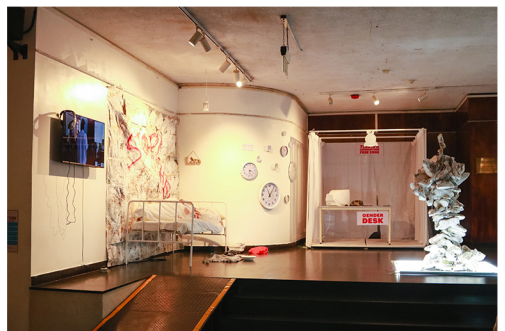


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2025 in pictures





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