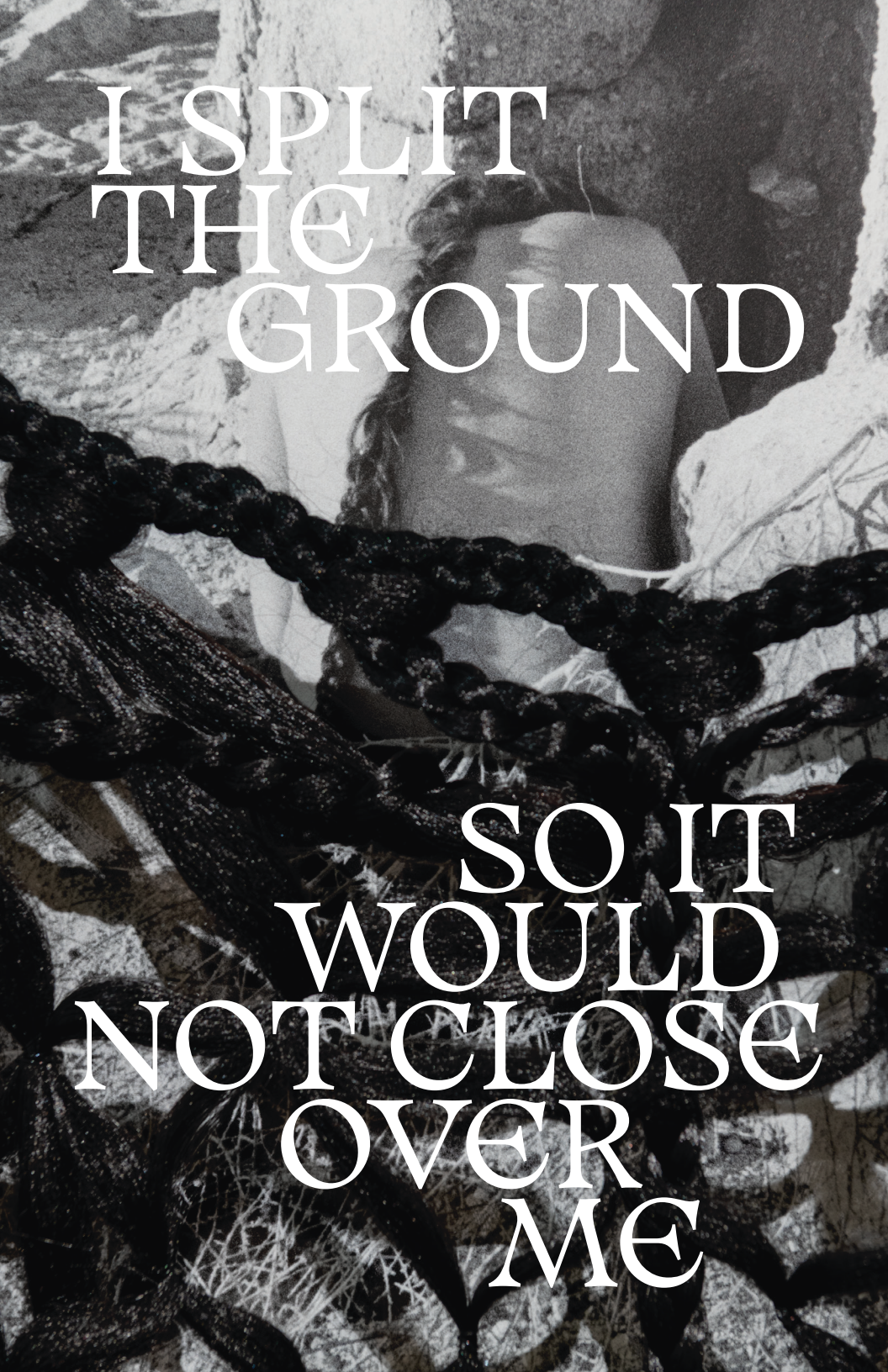
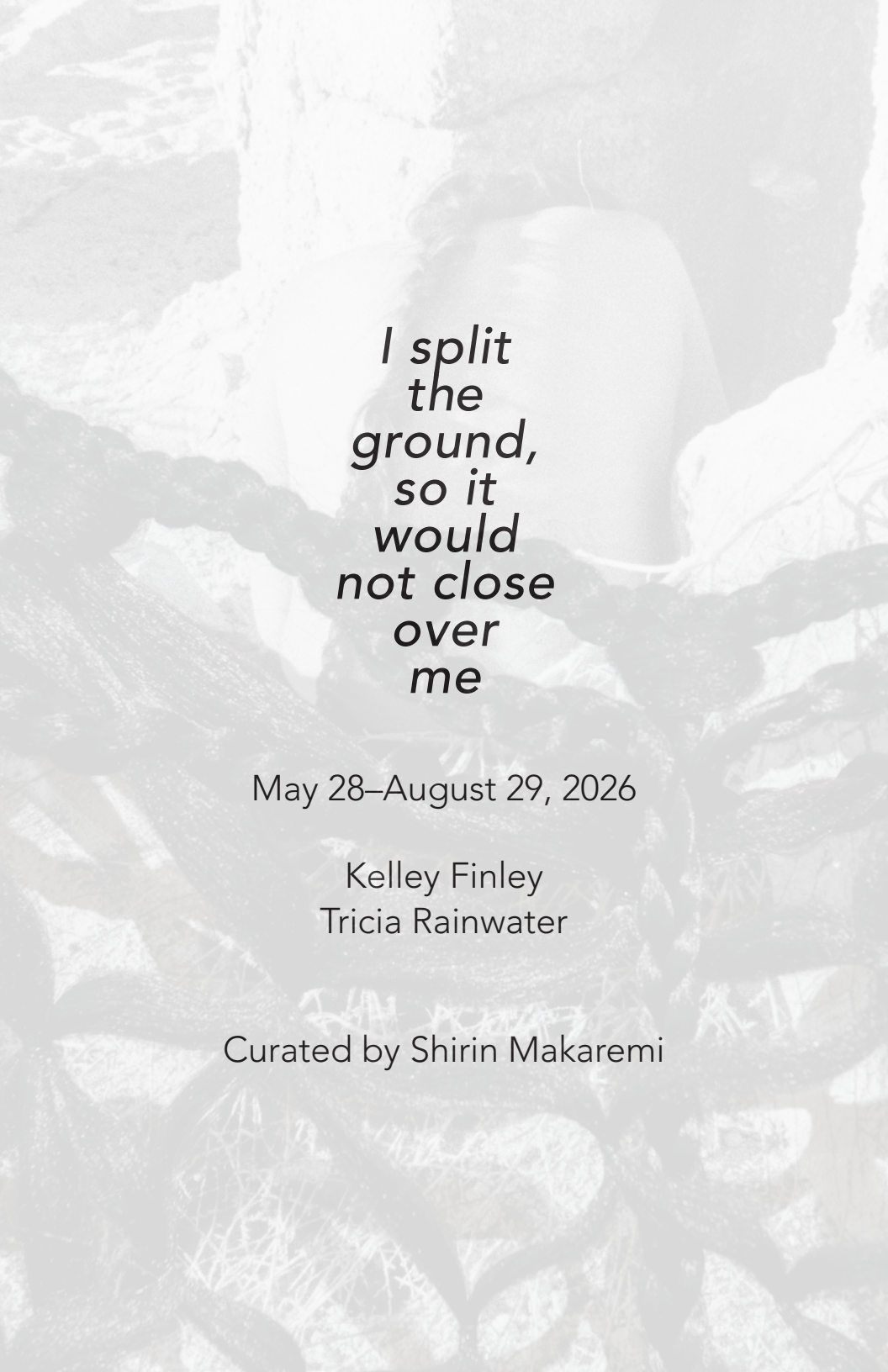




I SPLIT
THE
GROUND

SO IT
WOULD
NOT CLOSE
OVER
ME



*I split
the
ground,
so it
would
not close
over
me*

May 28–August 29, 2026

Kelley Finley
Tricia Rainwater

Curated by Shirin Makaremi

SFAC Land Acknowledgement:

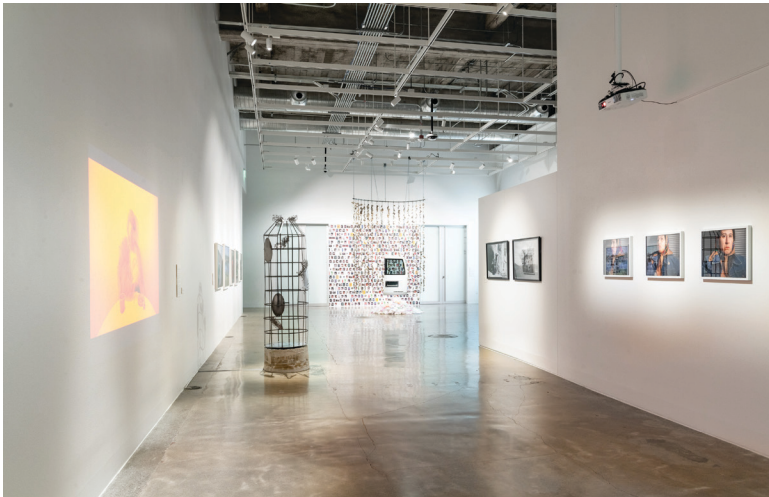
The San Francisco Arts Commission acknowledges that we are on the unceded ancestral homeland of the Ramaytush Ohlone who are the original inhabitants of the San Francisco Peninsula. As the indigenous stewards of this land and in accordance with their traditions, the Ramaytush Ohlone have never ceded, lost nor forgotten their responsibilities as the caretakers of this place, as well as for all peoples who reside in their traditional territory. As guests, we recognize that we benefit from living and working on their traditional homeland. We wish to pay our respects by acknowledging the ancestors, elders and relatives of the Ramaytush Community and by affirming their sovereign rights as First Peoples. As a department dedicated to promoting a diverse and equitable Arts and Culture environment in San Francisco, we are committed to supporting the traditional and contemporary evolution of the American Indian community.

All works courtesy of the artists.

Shirin Makaremi

Curator Essay

When entangled by our landscape, dreaming and reimagining a different path forward can be a form of resistance. To confront the violence these traumas impose is a powerful act. *I split the ground, so it would not close over me*, is the act of confronting experienced violence and creating a split in generational trauma as means of survival. Through sculpture, installation, and photography, artists Kelley Finley and Tricia Rainwater each approach survival as both a personal and collective experience.

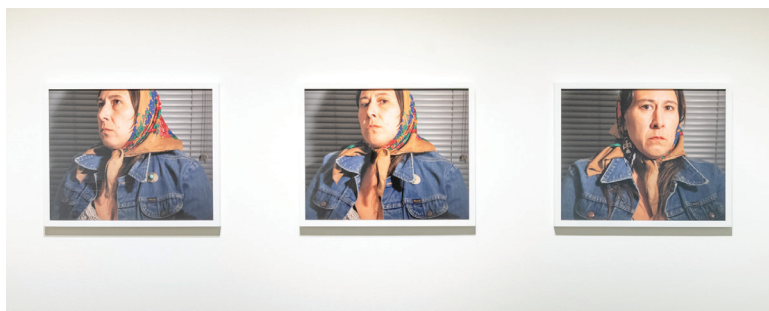


Installation view



Tricia Rainwater,
What Used to Be a Fig Tree, 2026.
Archival print.

Rainwater confronts her past as a grounding act in her survival, tenderly holding space for her younger self and other survivors. As the viewer enters the gallery they are faced with *What Used to Be a Fig Tree* (2026), a self-portrait of Rainwater standing in front of her father's home. This image is part of a larger series in which Rainwater documents her return to places connected to the seventeen years of her youth when she was trafficked by her father. In these images, she confronts the environments that allowed violence to occur. In the presence of her work, the viewer becomes witness to these violent acts, forced to confront a child's interrupted innocence.



"In these photos, I take on my grandmother's hardened gaze with blinds closed mirroring facial expressions and intensity in a similar setting to the childhood homes I was raised in. With a scarf wrapped around my head as she had in early childhood photos."

Tricia Rainwater,
Grandmas In the Kitchen
with the Blinds Closed, 2026.
Archival prints.



"In this video, I reconstruct my father at the table during our weekend visits. Through drag, I inhabit his persona, allowing my adult self to sit across from my child self and re-stage those encounters."

Tricia Rainwater,
My Father's Table, 2025.
05:05 minute, stop motion video.

In her triptych, *Grandmas In the Kitchen with the Blinds Closed* (2026), and video piece, *My Father's Table* (2025), Rainwater embodies her grandmother and her father. These works give the viewer a window into what young Rainwater experienced in the home. Within the gallery space, the two figures in these works sit across one another, creating a palpable tension between them.



Tricia Rainwater,
A Home Made of Disposable Things, 2026.
(Installation)



"Memorializing my older brother's labor of caretaking me as a child. I collected used and new Ziploc bags from friends and community members then filled them with washcloths. Creating a mound representing the unknown amount of times he cared for me after harm."

Tricia Rainwater,
The Wound Makes a Circle:
Altar of Care Under Absence, 2026.
Assorted size plastic bags filled
with washcloths.

"This curtain of oyster shells hung by sinew hangs between portals of pain and care, holding all. As I visit my ancestral homelands of Louisiana and Mississippi I am always considering my surroundings not having grown up there. On a visit a few years ago to our holy sites, I learned more about natural objects and their purposes along with where they were found in swamps, bayous, and on the land. Working to incorporate these into my practice has been essential to reflecting on how healing can happen personally and interpersonally."



Tricia Rainwater,
We Hung Protection Here, 2026 (detail).
Oyster shells, metal bar, sinew, chain.



Tricia Rainwater,
*Portal of Repetition / Portal for
What Will Not Leave*, 2026.
Chevrolet van door, chain.

"A replica for the Chevrolet van door I was moved in. I dragged the van door around for the past six months making images of myself with it and placing myself back at the sites of my harm in an act of defiance, remembrance, and affirmation. The door is now showing signs of wear on the bottom from being dragged up and down my staircase, through parking lots, and fields and now suspended with two metal chains and in this space."



(left to right) Tricia Rainwater, *Two Blocks from the Courthouse Where Mom Worked; Lodi Lake / Where My Parents Met*, 2026. Archival prints.



(left to right) Tricia Rainwater, *Dad's Park; Where I Was the Daughter of a Good Guy*, 2026. Archival prints.

The weight of loss, fear, tension and longing for safety hang heavy in the gallery. Yet amid this emotional gravity, Rainwater's work is also an assertion of agency. By centering her own experience and those of other survivors, she creates space for autonomy and self-determination. As an Indigenous queer woman, Rainwater holds space for Indigenous femmes and the complexities of their lived experiences, allowing their stories to exist beyond statutory definitions and institutional frameworks.



Tricia Rainwater,
Hiborn Street, 2026.
Archival print.

Tricia Rainwater

Artist Statement

Through this body of work, I confront the first seventeen years of my life. Emerging from experiences of trafficking, exploitation, and inherited violence, while engaging the ongoing labor of transmuting intergenerational trauma and colonial violence. In this installation, I center these objects as portals: points between past and present and a spell cast on what was, what is, and what could have been. I engage memory and, in turn, the work, not as a call for pity but as a wake-up call that refuses distance, implicating the viewer in what they witness.

A replica of the van door through which I was repeatedly moved functions as both entry and indictment. It positions the viewer as witness; implicated and unable to remain neutral, echoing the silence of those who saw and did not intervene. Beneath it, Ziploc bags filled with washcloths form an altar to my deceased brother, honoring his care for me in early childhood and marking an intimate, fragile site of protection within ongoing violence. Child taking care of child.

Working in my signature self-portrait practice, I return my adult body to the locations where harm occurred, visually mirroring the door across locations. These photographs operate as acts of refusal and confrontation. They

call into account family, community, and the institutions—particularly the Evangelical and Catholic church—that bore witness yet failed to act. In doing so, the work resonates with Indigenous feminist critiques of sexual violence articulated by thinkers like Sarah Deer, who situate violence against Indigenous women within the ongoing structures of colonial power.

In a practice of what Gerald Vizenor names **survivance**, my work creates an active presence resisting narratives of victimry and embracing what lies beyond survival. I created images marking years of abuse and a specific site of violation. These images are part of a larger series that function not only as testimony, but as insistence: I point to each location as undeniable evidence of harm. Proving to myself that these things happened. Drawing on the logic of post-factum photography, I re-enter these spaces without altering them, allowing the landscape to remain unchanged while my body bears witness to what they hold and what the land and my body remembers.

In returning, I attend to how memory lives in the body and in place, how these sites continue to hold what has happened to myself and countless others, whether known or unknown.



Tricia Rainwater, *Ohoyo*, 2026. Archival print.



Kelley Finley, *of ribcage lined in silver*, 2026.
Steel, hair, concrete, hairspray

Curator Essay, continued

Across the Gallery, Finley honors the unsung strength of Chinese immigrants. Inspired by a Chinese folktale about a two headed bird, Finley draws parallels between the resilience of immigrants and of birds. In her self-portraits, Finley embodies the bird in a changed landscape: striking and emotional representation of survival and adaptation. Finley's photographs, sculptures and installations pay tribute to the real history and experiences of Chinese immigrants.



Installation view



Kelley Finley, *distant land forgot your shape, wind kept your hair long after you were gone*, 2026.
Archival pigment print 120mm.



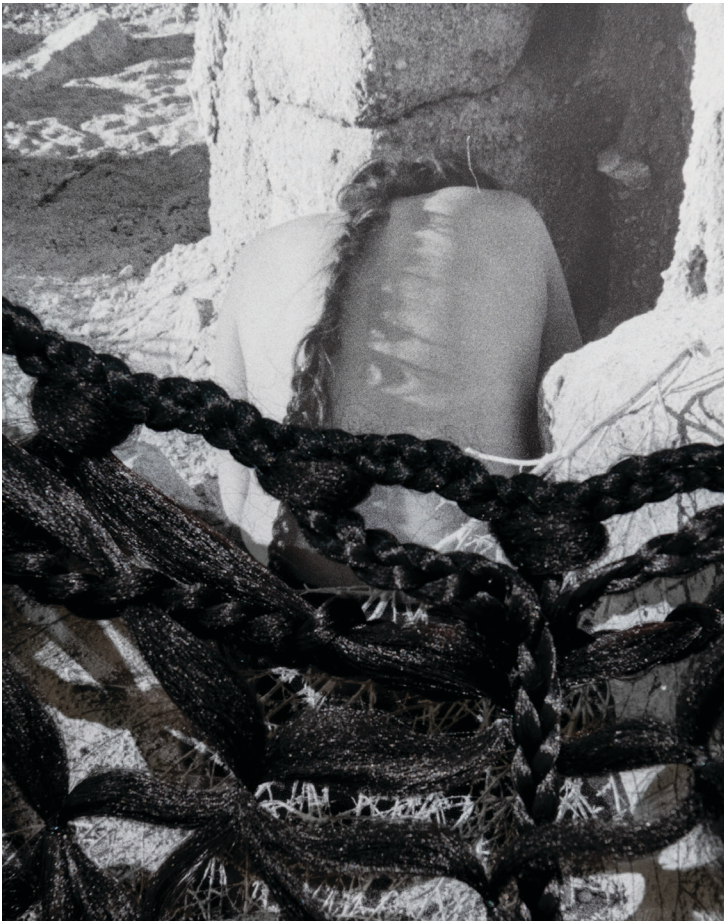
Kelley Finley, *beneath a sky that
never learned to hold us*, 2026.
Archival pigment print 120mm.



"A ritual and practice that carries voices and transcends through light, echoing across generations, and spreads messages of survival. Moments of my grandmother telling stories and tales, light filtering in from her apartment window, reflecting off her face as she glows, enraptured by the retelling of her life and the stories she once heard. Her stories, woven from memory, folk tales, joy, and loss, moved between generations like birdsong, returning endlessly through retelling, reborn again and again."

Kelley Finley, *to know the light comes is to save a one-winged bird*, 2026.
Archival pigment prints 120mm and 35mm, glass, tin-lead alloy,
cat whisker, copper, feather, stainless chain, enamel.

Her research of San Francisco and Oakland's Chinatowns and interviews with Chinese American women are woven into her work throughout the exhibition. We see long braided hair show up throughout Finley's work, a bow to the experience of extraction and exclusion during the Chinese Exclusion Act.



Kelley Finley, *under other skies, 1*, 2026 (detail).
Archival pigment print from 35mm, synthetic hair



(above) Kelley Finley, *under other skies, 1*, 2026. Archival pigment print from 35mm, synthetic hair

(below) Kelley Finley, *under other skies, 2*, 2026. Archival pigment print from 35mm, synthetic hair





Kelley Finley, *stepping back into a forgotten place, holding onto a gate as a feather blows through*, 2026.
Stainless steel composite, copper, hair, concrete,
tin-lead alloy, feather, stainless chain.



Kelley Finley, *stepping back into a forgotten place, holding onto a gate as a feather blows through*, 2026.
Stainless steel composite, copper, hair, concrete, tin-lead alloy, feather, stainless chain.

Remnants of gates from her walks through Chinatown are represented in her sculptural pieces, *stepping back into a forgotten place, holding onto a gate as a feather blows through* (2026).



Kelley Finley, *stepping back into a forgotten place, holding onto a gate as a feather blows through*, 2026.
Stainless steel composite, copper, hair, concrete, tin-lead alloy, feather, stainless chain.

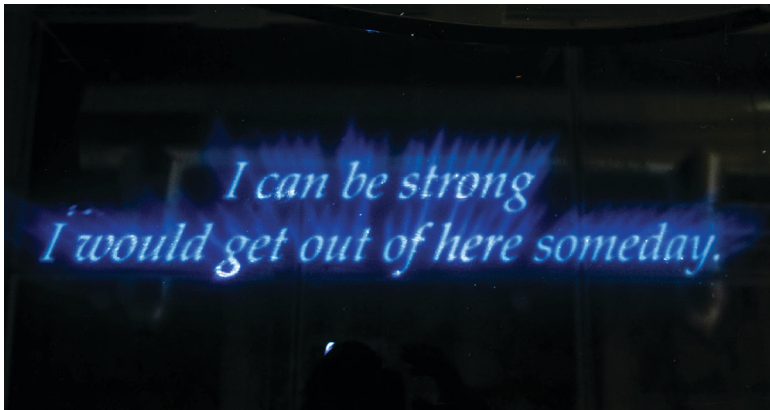
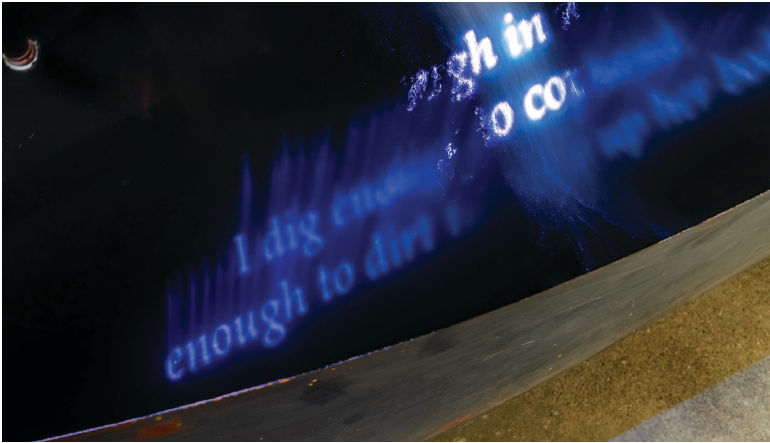


Kelley Finley, *stepping back into a forgotten place, holding onto a gate as a feather blows through*, 2026 (detail).



(on the wall) Kelley Finley, *land held my outline, creating a wound to place your name into, stretching longer than the earth beneath it*, 2026. Archival pigment print, 120mm.

In a dimmed room, Finley's piece, *standing at a corner, hearing the birdsong of women* (2026), invites viewers to listen to the stories of older generations and reflect on their lived experiences. It reminds us of what has been endured and what was overcome.



(below on the right and above) Kelley Finley, *standing at a corner, hearing the birdsong of women*, 2026. 20-minute video, multimedia sculpture with rain fountain, projection mapping, and sound. Welded steel, water pump, cinder blocks, cotton, copper, water, styrene-butadiene, astragalus root, helichrysum, lily bulb, Hawthorne berry, orange, concrete.



Kelley Finley, *standing at a corner, hearing the birdsong of women*, 2026. 20-minute video, multimedia sculpture with rain fountain, projection mapping, and sound. Welded steel, water pump, cinder blocks, cotton, copper, water, styrene-butadiene, astragalus root, helichrysum, lily bulb, Hawthorne berry, orange, concrete.

Both artists evoke ancestral tools to guard and guide their work: Rainwater's curtain of oyster shells serves as a symbol of protection, as it's common in Choctaw Nation, and Finley's use of traditional Chinese medicine and natural dyes function as markers of ritual continuity, carrying practices of protection and healing. Together, these elements ground the artists' work in cultural knowledge that sustains them across time, place, and experience.



Kelley Finley, *meet where the sky bends backward into itself*, 2026.
Acid and natural hand dyed wool, pine, acorn husk, ferrous sulfate,
walnut, iron pigment, pomegranate skins, black tea, chrysanthemum,
long kui, logwood, synthetic hair, antique silver foil, stainless chain.

In, *I split the ground, so it would not close over me*, both Finley and Rainwater delve into personal and communal histories. The artists explore what it means to sustain communities and how defiance is an ongoing process. Their work speaks to how listening and retelling stories of lived violence helps open up portals to healing and survival for the collective.



Kelley Finley, *held by bowstring, shadow misplaces itself bending from a charcoal filled center*, 2026. Archival pigment print 120mm.

Kelley Finley

Artist Statement

Rooted in a Chinese folk tale, my work for this exhibition reflects on a story of two friends who, after death, are reborn as a two-headed bird. The story becomes a framework through which these works consider interdependence, migration, memory, and survival, exploring the relationships between Chinese Americans and immigrants, and the cities they inhabit and support. Like migratory birds bound instinctually to place despite displacement, these communities remain deeply connected to one another and to evolving ideas of home while navigating the violences, ruptures, and inheritances embedded within the places they move through. The work examines how marginalized communities often inherit fractured relationships to "home," where care and rupture exist simultaneously, and survival depends upon collective and personal adaptation.

This work approaches folk tales as an oral archive; a living system of knowledge capable of transmitting survival strategies, care, resistance, and cultural continuity across generations. Each work in the exhibition reflects a different moment in the folk tale: the birds captured and surveilled, moments of tenderness and mutual devotion, and the instant when their connection is witnessed, admired, or endangered.

Interviews with Chinese immigrant women and Chinese American women amplify their voices, memories, and experiences. These interviews become a living record of migration, labor, care, and longing. Birdsong is reimagined, individually and collectively, woven across personal histories, immigration routes, and diasporic experiences. Their stories trace how care circulates through communities, how these women shape and uphold the cities they live in, and how survival is sustained collectively. Chinese medicinal herbs are used as gestures of ritual and ancestral remembrance, offering protection for displaced bodies across fractured landscapes and searching for places of belonging.

The work approaches dreams as both ritual and resistance: spaces where new relationships, futures, and histories can be imagined across time. Photographs function as dreamlike dystopian landscapes inhabited by ruined terrains, shifting bodies, and fragmented spaces that evoke traces of exile, extinction, and ecological ruin. Bodies and environments become intertwined, resisting fixed narratives of assimilation. Hybrid identity emerges not as fragmentation, but as a mode of adaptation, one that imagines alternative futures, sustains connection, and survives within fragile and shifting places.



Kelley Finley, *of ribcage lined in silver*, 2026. (detail)

Tricia Rainwater is a Choctaw multimedia artist based in the San Francisco Bay Area, with roots in the Central Valley and New Mexico. Her multidisciplinary practice spans self-portraiture, sculpture, large-scale murals, and installation, and her work has been presented at institutions including the Berkeley Center for the Arts, ICA San Francisco, MOCA Toronto, Muz Collective, ICA San Jose, and San Francisco Camerawork, among others.

In 2022, Rainwater was awarded a grant from the San Francisco Arts Commission to document herself along the Choctaw route of the Trail of Tears. Grounded in themes of identity, loss, and survivance, her work offers a distinctly Choctaw perspective on grief and resilience. Through her practice, Rainwater confronts histories of erasure and displacement by revisiting sites of pain, transforming them into spaces for remembrance, resistance, and collective healing.

Kelley Finley is an interdisciplinary artist whose work is autoethnographic, primarily working in sculpture, textiles, and performance. Finley received her MFA from California College of the Arts and a BFA in Sculpture and a B.S. in Art Education from Kutztown University. Her work has been exhibited internationally in Hong Kong and Italy, and across the US. Recently, she was an Artist in Residence at Recology, SF, and participated in Edge on the Square's Annual Contemporary Art Event.

Shirin Makaremi is an Iranian-American artist and curator based in San Francisco, CA. Makaremi has over 10 years of experience working within the Bay Area art community where she has curated and facilitated exhibitions and programs. She enjoys working with emerging local artists, collaborating and supporting them to take a leap with their practice. Makaremi has worked with a number of Bay Area organizations, such as the San Francisco Arts Commission Main Gallery, Makaan Artist Residency, 500 Capp Street Foundation, Southern Exposure, Zamin Project, SF Camerawork, and SOMArts. Makaremi received her BA from San Francisco State University in Studio Art and Art History.

Colophon

I split the ground, so it would not close over me

Kelley Finley
Tricia Rainwater

Curated by Shirin Makaremi

May 28 – August 29, 2026
San Francisco Arts Commission Galleries
401 Van Ness Avenue, Suite 126
San Francisco, CA 94102
sfartscommission.org

Published by SFAC Galleries
Photography: Aaron Wojack
Design: Jada Haynes

San Francisco Arts Commission Galleries staff:

Matthew Goudeau,
Director of Cultural Affairs

Ebon Glenn,
Deputy Director of Programs

Jackie Im,
Associate Curator

Theo Lau,
Program Associate

Matt McKinley,
Lead Preparator

The artists and curator would like to thanks Matt McKinley, Thi Phromratanapongse, Marian Narvaez, Andy Moraga, Rich Lomibao, Brooke Farrington, Jennifer Porras, adrian clutario, Dara J., Shay Lari-Hosain, Sterling Graphics, Seth Dickerman, Margaret Yip, Betty Kwan Chinn, Sue Ying Lee, and Mark Heller.

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