

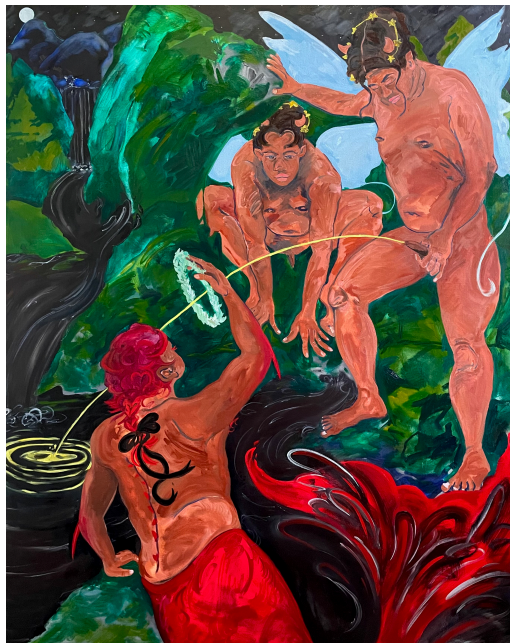
Weep  
TO WATER THE  
Trees

May 13 - August 19, 2023  
Opening Reception: May 13, 4 - 7pm

/ (Slash) 1150 25th St, Building B, San Francisco  
Open Thursday - Saturday, 11am - 6pm

Megan Bent / Dionne Lee / Matt Morris / Ricardo Partida / J Rivera Pansa

Curated by Aay Preston-Myint



Ricardo Partida, *Moonlight's Ode to Victory*, 2022, oil on canvas, 48 x 60 inches

*"From the black and broken Earth, tiny beings of pure light emerge one by one, gentle as the breath of a sleeping child, barely treading the earth with their transparent feet...Lavender colors hover in space like butterflies. Slender flutes extend toward the heavens and fragile melodies burst in the air like bubbles. The rosy shapes keep sprouting from the wounded earth."*

- Clarice Lispector, *O delírio/The Fever Dream*  
[Translated by Katrina Dodson]

*Weep to Water the Trees* is an artistic survey of newly improvised forms of animism, nature-based spirituality, and ecological inquiry, as they appear in contemporary art and the life of communities at the margins. The artists and artworks presented draw together images and narratives that weave

beauty, spirit, rage, and melancholy into bridges between the human and "natural," spiritual, or non-human worlds.

*Weep to Water the Trees* is the third in an arc of shows I have curated across the Bay Area that consider ecology and the environment through different lenses. The first was *Tomorrow is Already Here* (Headlands Center for the Arts, 2020), in which art, research, and writing synthesized community knowledge and collaborative dreaming into proposals for new ways of life and survival amid climate chaos. The second, *Dewdrops in the Garden* (Southern Exposure, 2022), explored pleasure, eroticism, and poetics as tools for bonding with nature. Here, in *Weep to Water the Trees*, I am honored to be given space at / (Slash) to dive into a darker, witchier, trickster's perspective on what it means to be in dialogue with the earth.

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**Dionne Lee** employs various lens-based practices such as video, photography, and collage/found imagery, to establish and explore relationships to the American landscape. In her video work, we follow the artist's first-person perspective through both developed and more isolated landscape on a dowsing or "witching" walk. While "witching" is a folk practice commonly used to find hidden water sources or other natural resources, the eerie monochrome footage suggests something more. Lee's heavy use of black and white imagery, rather than pointing to the past, actually underscores the dreamlike, alternate-future quality of her visions, projecting the narratives into a metaphysical realm of exploration and uncertain possibilities. As we scan the landscape to follow the artist's hands and the shadowy, shaky pointers of the wood and wire dowsing sticks, we embark on a quest for the agency and power of survival. What seems like a search for basic necessities might rather be an emotional, historical, and spiritual journey.

**Ricardo Partida's** paintings of what he affectionately calls "Fagazons" and "Fag Fatales" portray mythical hybrids of nymphs, gargoyles, and club kids cavorting and plotting your downfall amid dreamlike snippets of landscape. Partida's mischievous flash narratives upend a traditional (male) painterly gaze, but hold on to certain elements of voyeurism and seduction. The result can make the viewer feel uncomfortably caught in the act, something like an unwelcome visitor stumbling upon a secretive and very sexy ritual scene. Unless, of course, you're into that sort of thing - which you just might find yourself.

**Matt Morris'** work tends to do too much. The layers of begging, borrowing and stealing, particular and obscure references, labyrinthine titles and materials lists, and, of course, gossip, are of Wildean proportions. However, after sitting with each piece, and letting the deeper narratives of admiration, longing, and loss unfold, it feels less like appropriation art and more like an illustration of symbiosis, which has always run through underground or out-of-the-mainstream art scenes: a queer (and perhaps feminine/effeminate) preference for decentering and stewardship. A mother spider stirring spells from a cauldron of influences, Morris skillfully bathes the viewer in a lush, confounding, and fey mix of materials and sensory inputs ranging from fake plastic trees and images of sculptor Petah Coyne's flowers (retrieved from Morris' late father) to a dark, botanical scent worn by gallery staff.

In **J Rivera Pansa's** mixed media works, abstraction and representation are not necessarily opposites, meeting instead along the way in symbolism and

allegory. Pansa's subdued, sculptural studies of shape and color draw from craft traditions such as chain maille, stained glass, and *binakul* textiles from the Philippines, each with their own particular spiritual and historical uses. Subtle incorporation of plant material and landscape imagery, mixed with formal references that simultaneously evoke modernist grids and bondage furniture, add further layers to Pansa's brutalist compositions, which protect a merciful, melancholy spirit within.

Many of **Megan Bent's** photographs use the process of chlorophyll printing, a long-exposure contact process that develops images by contrasting the green pigment in plants with the bleaching action of the sun, allowing a leaf to hold a picture. By exposing the leaves to films made from x-rays and other medical body-scanning techniques, archival images, and private photographs, Bent portrays a spectrum of emotions presented by "crip" life from both personal and historical perspectives. Some prints deal with cultural stigma and eugenics mindsets, while others document chronic pain, depleted energy, solidarity, and companionship. Bent's body of work is shown in two ways, side by side: reproductions of the chlorophyll prints when they were first made, showing saturated color gradients and tonal character, alongside the original chlorophyll leaves, which are slowly biodegrading under blackout cloth. The materials and presentation, combined with the subject matter of disabled life, reflect the values of "impermanence, care, interdependence and slowness" [MB] intrinsic to Bent's process and practice, as well as disability communities at large.

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Together, the works in this exhibit reflect the darkened, secret places of the natural world - the understories, mycelium, cenotes, and warrens that pulse with power and coolness, beautiful but sometimes fearsome places that still welcome those who come to pay respect. They are a reminder that, whether cast into shadow by force or by choice, those of us living in the margins - we queer, disabled, brown, femme, and more - will continue to breathe life into one another through a fabulous diversity of care, craft, and magic.

- Aay Preston-Myint

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*Weep to Water the Trees*, curated by Aay Preston-Myint, is the ninth in a series of exhibitions at Slash since 2019, each organized by an independent Bay Area-based guest curator.

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**Aay Preston-Myint** is an artist, publisher, curator, and educator working in the San Francisco Bay Area, after several years of building a career and community in Chicago, Illinois. Their practice employs both visual and collaborative strategies to investigate memory and kinship, often within the specific context of queer community and history. In addition to their studio work, they are a founder of No Coast, co-director of the Chicago Art Book Fair, and have served as a DJ and organizer for Chances Dances. They are currently the Executive Director of SF Camerawork and a member of the collective studio Real Time and Space, Southern Exposure's Curatorial Council, and the Board of Directors at Small Press Traffic.

**Megan Bent** is a lens-based artist interested in the malleability of photography and ways image-making can happen beyond using a traditional camera. She is drawn to processes that reflect her disabled experience; especially interdependence, impermanence, care, and slowness. She was an artist in residence at Art Beyond Sight's 2021/2022 Art + Disability Residency and the Honolulu Museum of Art, HI. Her work has been featured in *Lenscratch*, *Analog Forever Magazine*, *Fraction Magazine*, and *Too Tired Project*.

**Dionne Lee** is a visual artist working in photography, collage, sculpture, and video. Her work explores power and personal history in relation to the American landscape, and interrogates historical narratives that exist within photographic representations of land and place. Lee received her MFA from California College of the Arts. She has exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art, FERIA Material, New Orleans Museum of Art, Aperture Foundation, Museum of Fine Arts Houston, and the San Francisco Arts Commission, among others. Lee was a 2022 Artist-in-Residence at the Chinati Foundation and is a 2021-2023 Artist-in-Residence with Unseen California.

**Matt Morris** is a dedicated polymath based in Chicago whose practice incorporates work as an artist, perfumer, writer, curator, and educator with efforts conspiring about inquiries regarding femininity, repression, fashion, and the political realities of subjecthood. Morris has presented artwork nationally and internationally in the United States, and writing in numerous anthologies, exhibition catalogues, monographs, and journals of record. Morris is a transplant from southern Louisiana who holds a BFA from the Art Academy of Cincinnati and earned an MFA in Art Theory + Practice from Northwestern University, as well as a Certificate in Gender + Sexuality Studies.

**Ricardo Partida** was born in Ecatepec, Mexico. The artist received an MFA in Painting and Drawing from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in Illinois in 2020 and a BFA in Studio Art from the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley in 2017. Partida's work challenges conventional power structures by creating exalted alter egos and performative avatars that obscure the artist and the subject. Partida's work examines art history and its representation of male desire, particularly gendered visual language and its relationship to the homoerotic gaze. Partida lives and works in Chicago, Illinois.

**J Rivera Pansa** (*they/them*) is a transdisciplinary artist based in Huichin Ohlone Land, Oakland, CA. Their work incorporates sculpture, text, and performance as an expansive "grid" field tethering form and reflections on humanistic systems regarding modular seriality and contemporary capital structures. Rivera Pansa completed their BA in Art Practice from UC Berkeley and has shown work at Pied-à-terre (San Francisco, CA), Nook Gallery (Oakland, CA), NIAD Art Center (Richmond, CA), Lane Meyer Projects (Denver, CO), BAMPFA (Berkeley, CA) among others.

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**/ (Slash)** is a nonprofit visual art space founded in 2018 to advance and promote the expanding field of contemporary art in San Francisco through exhibitions, publications, and public programming.