

SWEETWATER,

Marina Grize
Divine icons roam as lens
March 5, 2026 to April 18, 2026

“The past is not a husk yet change goes on

Freedom. It isn’t once, to walk out
under the Milky Way, feeling the rivers
of light, the fields of dark—
freedom is daily, prose-bound routine
remembering. Putting together, inch by inch
the starry worlds. From all the lost collections.”

Adrienne Rich, “For Memory” (1979)¹

Divine icons roam as lens presents devotional objects rooted equally in lesbian history and the mnemonic materialities of photography and sculpture. Paying homage to lesbian communities in San Francisco during the 1980s, artist Marina Grize layers traces from the urban landscape with photographic images sourced from issues of the iconic lesbian erotic magazine *On Our Backs* between 1984 and 1989. The exhibition’s title is a near-anagram of “Valencia in Mission Dolores”—the names of the San Francisco street and neighborhood which were a center of lesbian community and activism in the 1980s.

In summer 2025, Grize punctuated days of scanning and photocopying pages from *On Our Backs* at the San Francisco Public Library with repeated walks up and down Valencia Street. The area has undergone rampant gentrification since the 1980s; as she walked, she searched for features of the neighborhood which remained from fifty years prior: wrought iron grates, cement sidewalks, and errant marks scratched onto trees. In the resultant artworks, Grize integrated the embodied experience of walking Valencia Street with the images she scanned from *On Our Backs*. Grize’s (re)printing of the source photographs from photocopies purposefully degrades the image quality, granting each excerpt a smoky opacity. This effect also references the difficulties of accessing these materials through the compounding haze of censorship, homophobia, and time.²

Grize intervenes in these histories of presence and absence materially—she imbues the space of Valencia Street and the pages of *On Our Backs* with a profoundly embodied physicality. Insisting on the necessity of manual methods even within mechanized processes, Grize cast Valencia Street’s features in aluminum metal molds. The most delicate features adorn the edges of the metal frames—their contours preserved in slender sheets of metal clay. This emphasis on tactility, presence, and the messy erotics of frottage, impression, and contact appears (though more subtly) in the photographic medium, too. Grize produced the photographs using contact printing, a method which places an image in direct contact with photosensitized chemicals to produce the photograph. Both the cast frames and the photographs they contain are relics of touch.

Shining silver frames, in some cases slender and delicate, in others heavy and rugose, cradle the photographs at their centers. In some cases, one photograph opens onto another, its glistening surface sliced away to reveal a second image underneath. Each photograph is sunken into the cast aluminum surface like jewels nestled into a setting. They conjure devices of recollection and veneration, like Byzantine icons and Victorian

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lockets, as well as more idiosyncratic, vernacular registers of residual presence—a penny thrown into a pond, lovers’ names carved into a tree, or an irreverent mark made in wet cement.

Each photographic fragment dilates on a single, crystalline detail: a belly button indenting an expanse of flesh; the back of a neck encircled with pearls; two faces bent at opposing angles, lips about to meet. In one photograph, two silver chains swing—silver is inside and outside, image and fact, represented and present. Articulating photography and sculpture’s shared indebtedness to metal, the artworks seamlessly integrate frame with photograph as coequal participants in the project of memory. What is photography if not images perpetually vying with remembrance, always striving to match the mind’s “memory-image”?³ What is casting if not metal remembering its mold?

Exhibition text by Nora Rosengarten

- 1 Adrienne Rich, “For Memory” in *A Wild Patience Has Taken Me This Far: Poems 1978-1981* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 1981), 21-22.
- 2 Hito Steyerl, “In Defense of the Poor Image,” in *e-flux* Journal No. 10 (November 2009): 1-9.
- 3 Siegfried Kracauer, “Photography,” Thomas Y. Levin, trans. in *Critical Inquiry* (Spring 1993): 425.