

An abstract painting featuring a series of horizontal, wavy bands of color. The palette is dominated by various shades of blue, from light sky blue to deep, dark navy, with occasional streaks of purple and white. The texture appears layered and somewhat grainy, suggesting the use of thick paint or a specific technique like marbling or watercolor. The overall effect is reminiscent of a cross-section of water or a geological stratum.

WATERLINE

**CHRISTA GRENAWALT
CANESSA GALLERY, SAN FRANCISCO
FEBRUARY 2025**



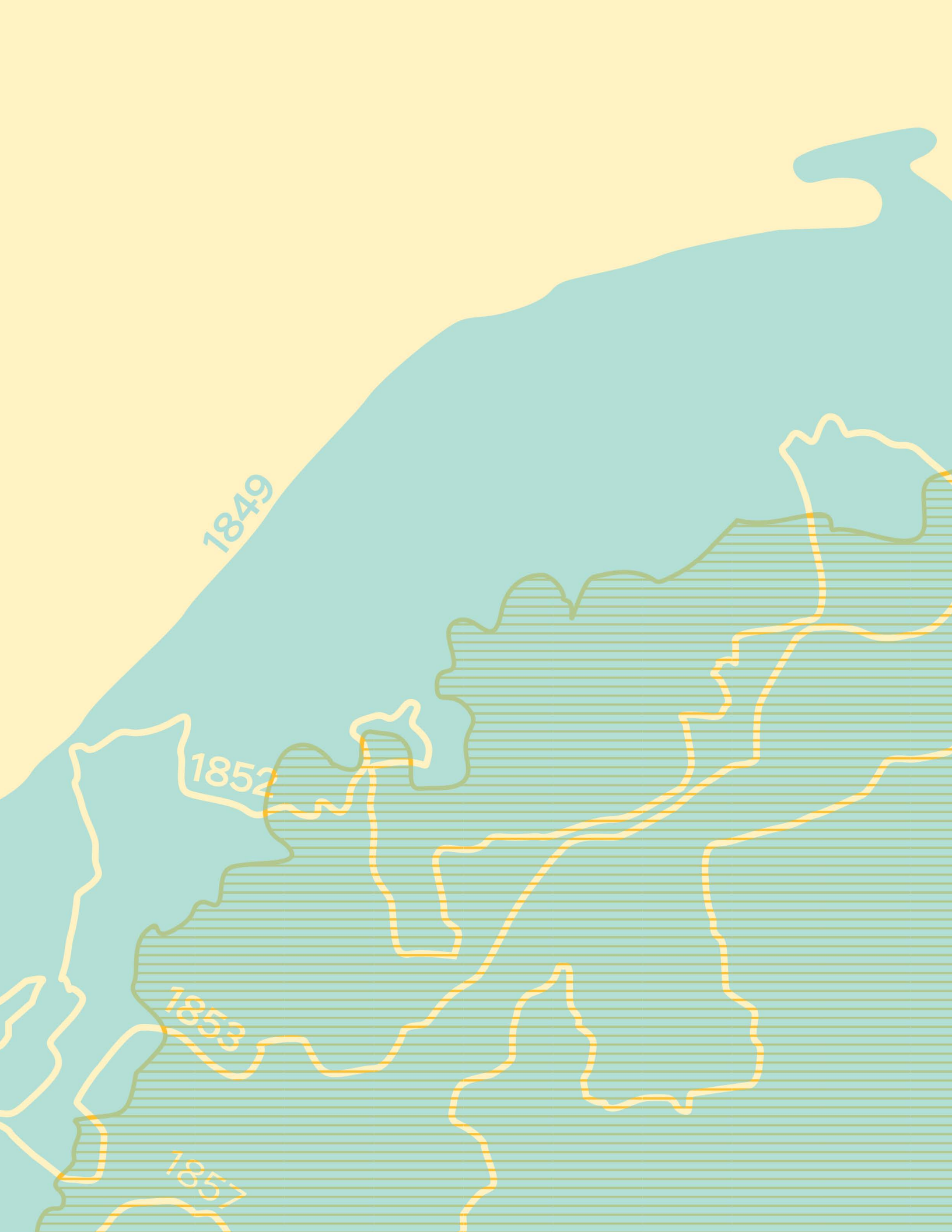
WATERLINE

CHANGING SHAPE OF BAY FROM ORIGINAL WATERLINE IN 1847

Built over an early sea wall, Canessa Gallery is a reminder of the ephemeral nature of the bay. A call to creatively address the balance of rising tides with restoration and resilience.



Land Acknowledgment: This map resides on the ancestral lands of the Ramaytush Ohlone, who stewarded this land for thousands of years. This map honors the bay as a dynamic, ever-changing landscape that requires planning for an adaptive future as sea levels rise.



The Canessa Building, located at 708 Montgomery Street, represents San Francisco's transformation from natural shoreline to urban hub. Once part of the tidal marshes and mudflats of Yerba Buena Cove, this area was claimed as part of the city in the mid-19th century during the Gold Rush. Sand, rubble, and abandoned ships were used to fill the cove, moving the shoreline outward and creating new land for the city's expansion. By 1893, after the Canessa Building was constructed, the area had become part of the Financial District and Barbary Coast.

Originally home to the Canessa Printing Company—prominent in the early 20th-century printing industry for producing school yearbooks and other materials—the Canessa Building is one of the few structures to have survived the 1906 earthquake and fire, a testament to the city's layered history. Beneath it, in the basement, an early seawall remains—a remnant of the past shoreline, once built to hold back the tides.

Now, more than a century later, the shoreline is shifting again. Rising sea levels, intensified storm cycles, and unbalanced weather patterns are reshaping San Francisco's coastline. Projections indicate that by 2100, sea levels could rise by three to six feet or more, putting over six percent of the city's land at risk of inundation, including parts of the Financial District. In response, the city has developed the Sea Level Rise Action Plan to enhance resilience and adaptation efforts. Additionally, the San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission (BCDC) adopted a Regional Shoreline Adaptation Plan in December 2024 to coordinate long-term responses across the Bay Area.

The Canessa Building, like the seawall beneath it, stands as both a historical marker and a reminder that no shoreline is permanent. What was once water may become water again. As the tides return, the city faces the challenge of adapting to a landscape that was never truly fixed. For further details on San Francisco's climate adaptation strategies: [bcdc.ca.gov](https://www.bcdc.ca.gov)



During the late 1960s, the building transitioned from a printing press to a gallery, becoming a hub for experimental art. It hosted “Trip” events that blended multimedia projections, music, and performance art—drawing artists, poets, and thinkers into a shared creative experience. The gallery’s vision extended beyond a traditional art venue, fostering a space for creativity, community engagement, and countercultural expression.

Today, Canessa Gallery remains a crossroads of art, history, and the environment—bridging past and present while inspiring new connections. I was struck by the deep layers of history embedded in the space. In one room, historical books, black-and-white slides from an old projector, and posters of San Francisco’s Barbary Coast brought the city’s past into vivid focus. The main gallery, with its brick walls rising to a skylight, felt like a spacious time capsule filled with stories.

One detail, however, sparked my curiosity in an unexpected way: a taped outline of a map on the gallery floor, marking the original waterline before the city expanded its shoreline outward during the Gold Rush. That simple line resonated deeply. Having recently created an installation in Venice reflecting on rising tides—waters that now regularly flood outside my studio in Sausalito—I have been increasingly drawn to the shifting boundaries between land and water. Richardson Bay, where I call home, has been central to my paintings, art research, and engagement with city planning.

This encounter led me to explore the intersection of Canessa’s history, the natural environment, and my own work. The gallery’s origins as a letterpress printing shop echoed my own path—connecting to my early career in book publishing and my years spent at Fort Mason’s printmaking studios before pursuing painting through graduate studies at the San Francisco Art Institute (SFAI).

Inspired by these connections, I collaborated with Thea Sizemore of Kavamore Press to create a letterpress map based on the taped waterline, overlaid with projected future sea level rise. This research, combined printmaking, felt like a way to imprint history onto the present—just as time has layered itself into the walls of the building. It became an opportunity not just to reflect on the past, but to consider what is possible next.

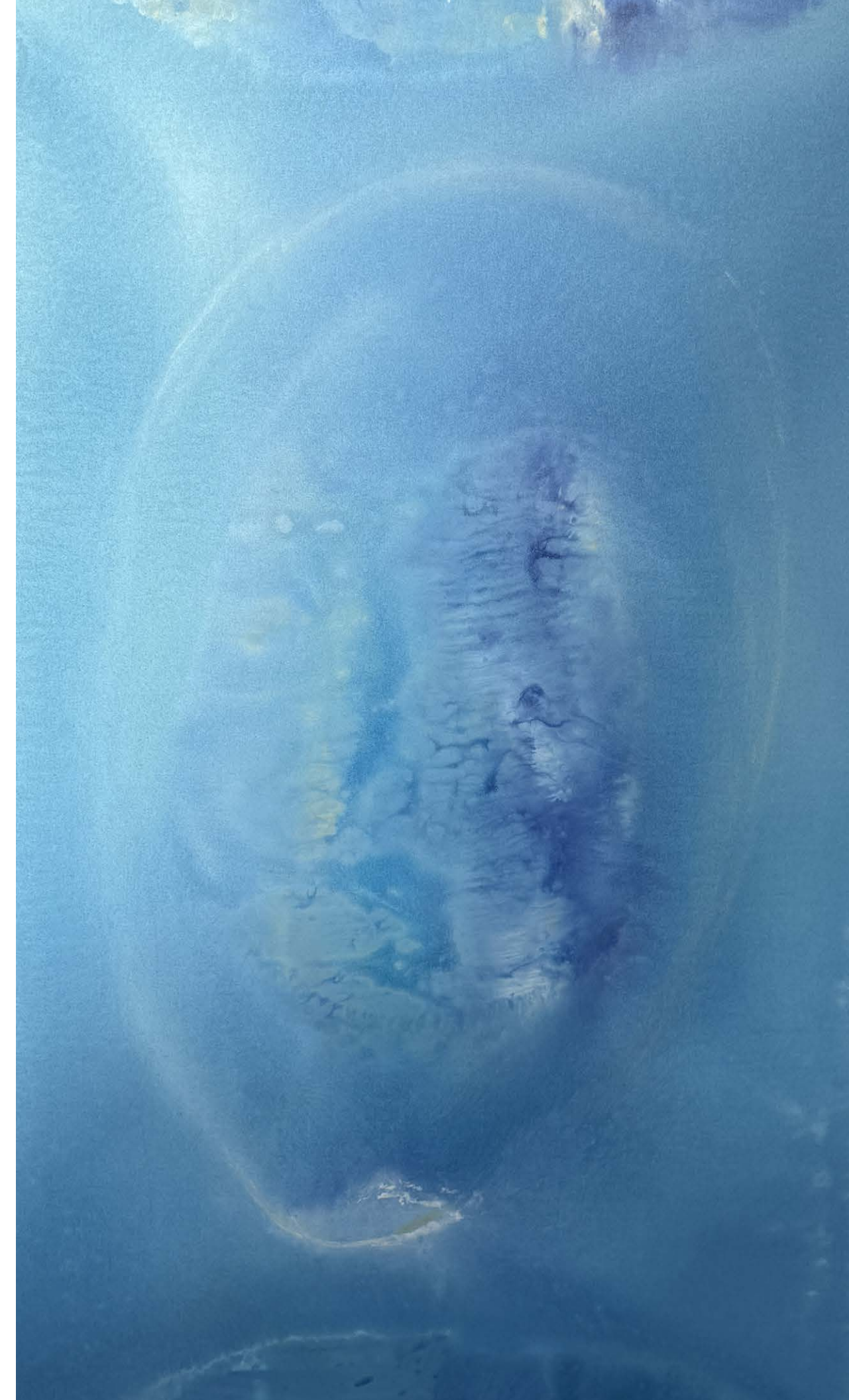
I envisioned a site-specific installation that would weave together the building's history, its connection to water, and the environmental themes that shape my work. The day after visiting the gallery, as storms swept through the bay area at the start of 2025, I created my first paintings of the year. Painted outdoors, these works stand on their own while also serving as potential backdrops for projections within the installation.

Inside the gallery, translucent fabrics drift beneath the skylight, moving with the air like shifting tides. Below them, a tape-marked waterline traces the floor—a quiet reminder of rising seas. Light transforms these suspended layers throughout the day—continuing the space's legacy of experimentation with light, space, and adaptation.

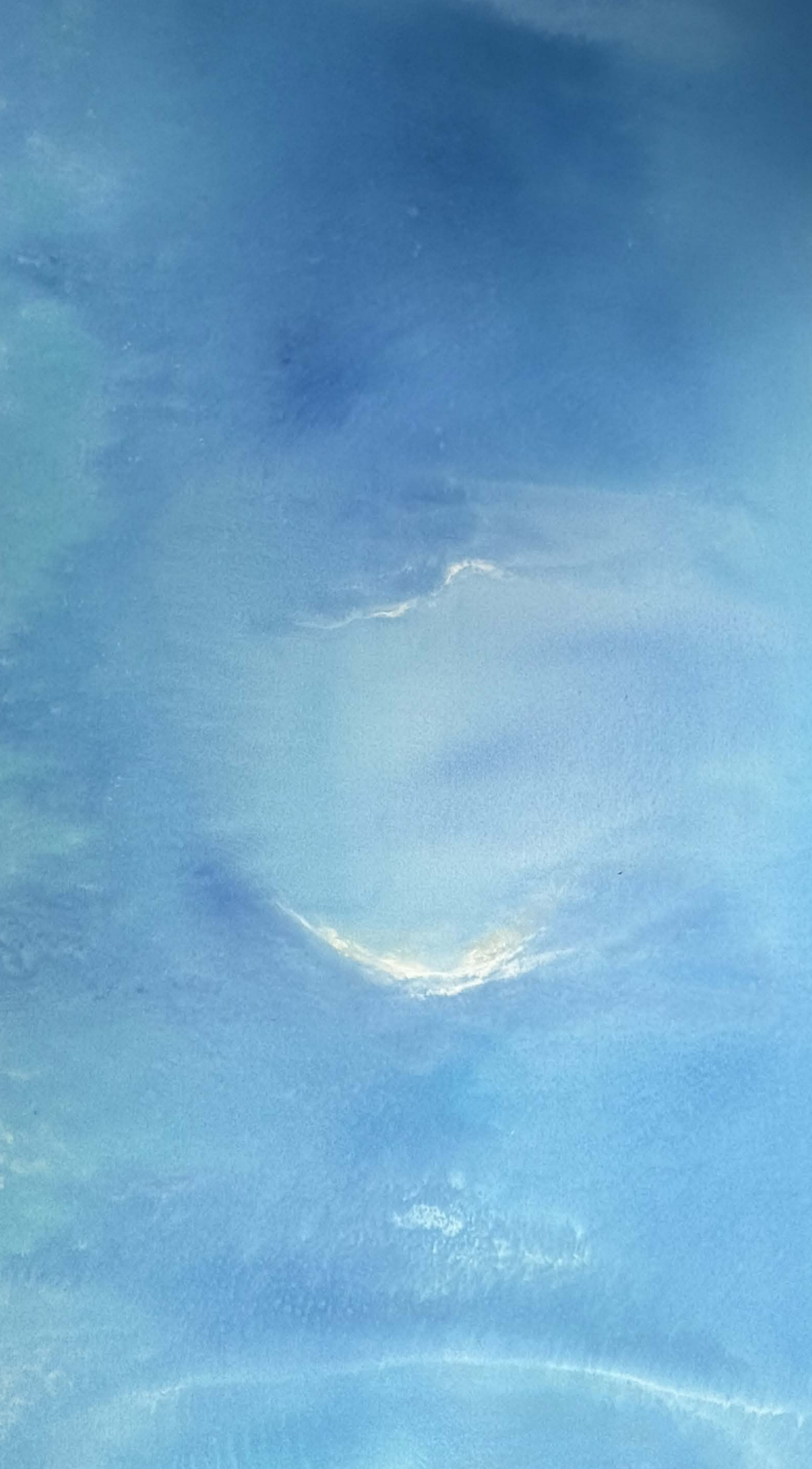
Through printmaking, painting, and installation, this work meditates on water—its power to sculpt landscapes, inscribe history, and hold memory. It is both a record of the past and a reflection on the future. As projections of rising sea levels once again reshape San Francisco's shoreline, there are choices in how to navigate these shifting boundaries.



Northern California experienced a significant atmospheric river event in November of 2024, bringing record-breaking rainfall and marking a pivotal moment in the region's climate history. This storm, part of a series of intense weather patterns, has set the stage for an unpredictable season ahead, highlighting the increasing frequency of extreme weather events. The collected rainwater in these vessels serves as a tangible connection to this transformative natural occurrence. Water, as a symbol of life and renewal, holds profound significance, especially at this juncture where personal, environmental, and political factors converge, marking a precipice of change.







These paintings were created outdoors on Mount Tiburon, beneath native oak and pine trees, using rainwater from the skies above Richardson Bay. Each piece captures the energy and transformation brought by precipitation, allowing the water itself to leave its own imprint. By exposing the canvases to the rain—sometimes briefly, other times for extended periods—I invite the water to have agency, shaping the work in ways that reflect the delicate balance between intention, external forces, and the unpredictability of painting in the rain.

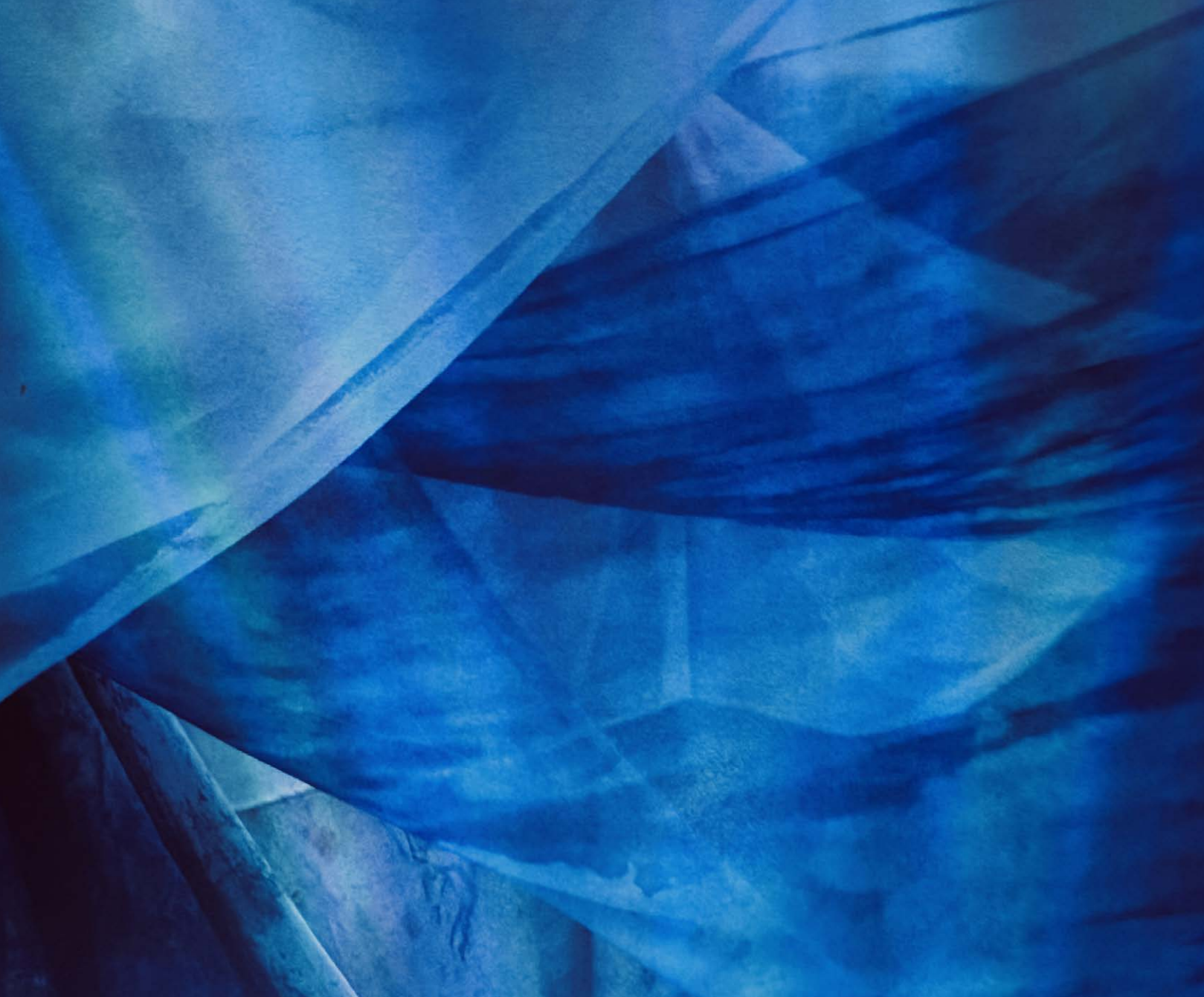
Northern California's climate exists on a threshold of profound change. Prolonged droughts and devastating wildfires have reshaped the land, only to be followed by the atmospheric rivers of winter 2022–2023, which brought sudden, intense rainfall. This cycle of extremes culminated in the record-breaking storm of November 2024, a historic downpour that underscored a collective experience of standing at the edge of increasingly volatile and unpredictable weather.

This exhibition was conceived before the fires in Los Angeles and will open on February 7, as communities in Southern California are just beginning to recover from widespread destruction. Devastation from fire is something that we in Northern California are also all too familiar with.

In 2020, as the Glass Fire reached the edge of my childhood home, I traced its path by dragging unstretched canvases through the ash, an act of witnessing and reclaiming. My work has long explored the elemental forces of fire and water—how they shape both land and psyche, destruction and renewal. This exhibition continues that inquiry, offering a space to reflect on the shifting boundaries of our environment and our own resilience within it.



Water reshapes the shore just as fire transforms the land. We stand in the space between—witnessing, adapting, and finding new ways forward.



Christa Grenawalt is a California-based artist whose work explores the dynamic relationship between natural forces and inner landscapes. Born in San Francisco, she is a first-generation Californian with a deep connection to the Pacific coastline. Grenawalt earned her MFA from the San Francisco Art Institute and maintains a studio at ICB in Sausalito.

Before fully dedicating herself to painting, she worked in book publishing with W.W. Norton, Phaidon Press, and Chronicle Books while developing her art practice at Fort Mason in printmaking and painting. Over the past decade, she has painted outdoors in Northern California and Kauai, allowing wind, rain, and the textures of the land to shape her canvases.

Her work incorporates iridescent pigments, gold, and metallics, inspired by the elements of fire, fog, and ocean. Since the 2017 Northern California fires, these elements have taken on new significance, symbolizing resilience and regeneration. Grenawalt's multi-layered compositions reflect shifting shorelines and the fluid boundaries between nature and self, inviting contemplation on how we adapt to an evolving environment.





Cover: The First Wave, Oceanscape Series, acrylic on canvas, 15 ft x 6 ft, 2014

Pages 1 and 2: Waterline, limited edition letterpress print and cartography, Thea Sizemore of Kavamore Press, 2025

Page 4: Through Water and Air, SFAI installation and video, 2018

Page 6: Collected Rainwater from the First Atmospheric River Storm, November 2024

Page 7: Conception, acrylic on canvas, 37 ¼ x 61 ¼, 2025

Page 8: Impression, acrylic on canvas, 37 ¼ x 61 ¼, 2025

Page 9: Liberation, acrylic on canvas, 37 ¼ x 61 ¼, 2025

Pages 12 and 13: Waterline Installation, Canessa Gallery 2025

Waterline floor map (that inspired this show and the letterpress map), Tim Armstrong, 2022

Page 14: Through Water and Air, SFAI Installation and video, 2018

Undertow, Oceanscape Series, acrylic on canvas, 15 ft X 6ft, 2020

Page 16: Waterline Installation, Canessa Gallery 2025

Inside back cover: Cacophony, music poster print, 11 X 17, 2023

At dusk, the wild parrots of San Francisco spiral in restless circles around the Canessa Building, framed by the silhouette of the Transamerica Pyramid. They settle onto the tree out front, their sharp calls—an ephemeral gathering—jarring and fleeting.



