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In Magalie Guérin's Mystical World, Form Speaks the Loudest

The Marfa-based, Montreal-born artist sets her ceramic sculptures and drawings in a semiotic premise at Corbett vs. Dempsey.

by Jefferson Godard | December 17, 2025

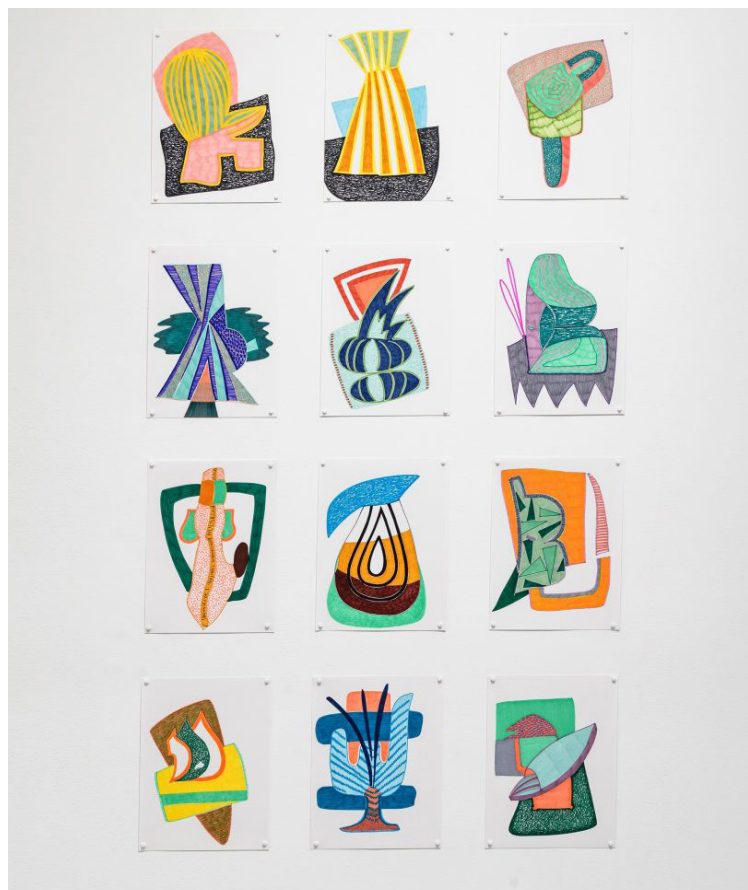


Magalie Guérin, installation view of “Shape Acts,” 2025, at Corbett vs. Dempsey/Photo: Bob

Marfa-based, Montreal-born artist Magalie Guérin manifests the mystical in “Shape Acts” at Corbett vs. Dempsey. Framed in an almost semiotic premise that speech does, this solo exhibition of her ceramic work invites us to dive deeper into these delightful and inviting objects. Ten aptly described totems make it clear that this artist is adept at working in both 2D and 3D. Guérin added ceramics to her repertoire during the pandemic and has become quite deft at it. The hand that has consistently created dynamic abstract landscapes on paper and canvas also possesses a dexterous poise in translating scale that is usually reserved for architects and sculptors. In fact, one can get easily lost in these vessels that take on characteristics of the body, nature and building at the same time.

They also share a kinship with a wild drawing practice that helped to generate them and contain hidden portals and details that subtly allude to body parts. Tongues, lips, and even an eye can be made out, but the artist sublimates any obvious relationships that obliterate them with an overlaid pattern or an intersecting form. Guérin leads us to where we think we might have some understanding of how these forms were generated but immediately takes us away and transports us to a new place. In one work, what might be otherwise characterized as spores and a fluted sponge-like element suggest a reference to nature. Yet this is immediately and skillfully contradicted by gridded patterns that gesture toward the built environment, conflating them all into a clever stance that keeps us intrigued. These maneuvers also speak to the ambiguity of language, which through the act of breaking it down can shift between signs and symbols.

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Glazes, textures and finishes are also paramount in assessing these containers, and they range from bumpy and crackled to glossy and honed. In both harmonious and conflicting patterns, we also discover cutouts, sanded edges and crisscrossing borders. There is astute evidence of layered and braided clay that hints to the rigor of her painting and drawing practice. In a similar nod, “Shape Acts” also includes a suite of drawings that while they are clearly informed by some of the same decisions apparent in her vividly textured abstract clay works, here they serve as a background rather than as a legend for deciphering or decoding. The drawings also give the viewer a moment to see flatness amidst the cacophony of forms nearby and summon contemplation while baiting us all the more.

“Shape Acts” gives spatial credence to the spaces generated in her paintings, yet transports us into another realm. Cleverly crafted ceramics coax on the edge of wanting to be touched and experienced. In Guérin’s world, speech may act, but it is form that speaks the loudest.

“Magalie Guérin: Shape Acts” is on view at Corbett vs. Dempsey, 2156 West Fulton, through January 3, 2026.