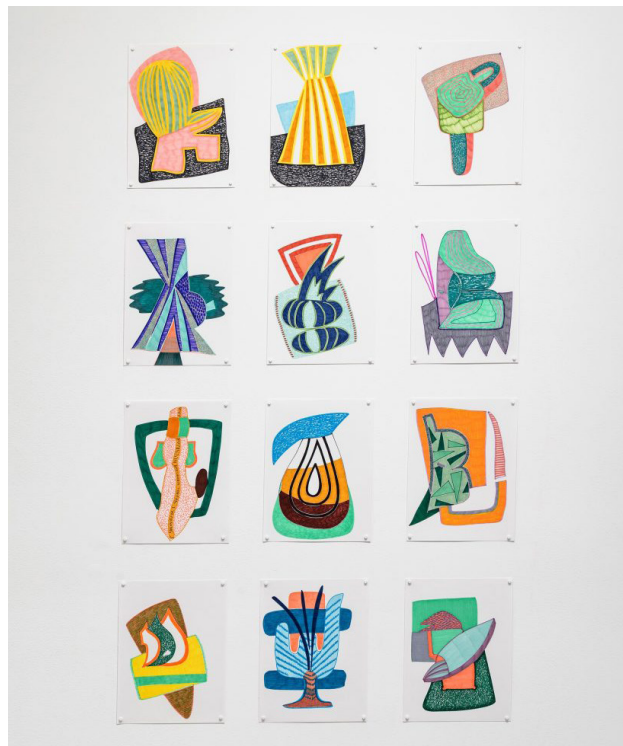




Magalie Guérin: Shape Acts

By HENIE ZHANG December 27th, 2025

Magalie Guérin makes objects that are something like music. Which is to say that they are all about rhythm: the ways in which repertoires of color and shape can be ordered to create patterns of familiarity and surprise. Guérin’s Shape Acts at Corbett vs. Dempsey only takes up two slim tables of sculptures and twelve drawings, but there are endless ways to track their intricate patternings and perceive them anew each time.



Installation view of Magalie Guérin, Shape Acts, November 6, 2025–January 3, 2026. Photo by Bob.
(Robert Heishman + Robert Salazar).

On the wall, the flock of brightly colored drawings—a form of “daily practice” for Guérin—seems to register the rhythms of the artist’s mind. We find many repetitive patterns: Gray and purple triangles alternate in a tipi shape; a striped black bulge gives rise to an identical other. But as they repeat, they mutate into something else. The triangles start morphing into a mottled bump. The second black bulge does not invite a third; it simply explodes. A textural vocabulary of woolly scribbles, stripes, and hazy dots also recurs across the drawings in diverse permutations. Guérin’s concoctions always look halfway to becoming a recognizable form—coral, plants, a boat—but refuse to ever cohere, spreading out instead into a symbiotic



Installation view of Magalie Guérin, *Shape Acts*, November 6, 2025–January 3, 2026. Photo by Bob.
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arrangement of colors and textures. Hung vertically, they hint at an intended orientation but reject any sense of gravity that would allow us to place them “upright.” We sense that Guérin’s shapes drive not towards polished, complete forms but indulge in the open-ended motion of play, in which the shape is continually surprised by itself as it grows.

This surprise is even more pronounced in Guérin’s sculptures. Like the drawings, they twist, split, and balloon into complex forms that can never make up their mind on what they want to be, but are never disorderly, either. Instead, they exist in a state of continual self-processing, endlessly rearranging elements and patterns into variations on a fickle theme. A certain orange cord crops up across the otherwise mutedly colored structures: In one, an orange line winds across ridges and planes to pool at the sculpture’s base; on the axe-shaped head of another, it loops five times then disappears; it clings to a third as a thick orange braid. Vents, raised checkerboard tiles, cracked green clay, and wormlike grooves are some other frequent motifs, and on any given surface they change, interrupt each other, and reappear at different rates. Familiar rhythms always proceed with an unfamiliar edge. For example, as we circle one cylindrical structure, we come upon a familiar checkerboard pattern on an alien, pipelike protrusion, but inside the pipe we discover a tube shape familiar from many other sculptures. A



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given surface could suddenly give way to slits and vents, which catalyze the switch into a differently patterned surface on the other side. And when a previously vanished element reappears, it can feel almost like a punchline.

Guérin’s art always works in proximity to spoken language. *Shape Acts* riffs on the term speech act, an utterance that is also a social action (e.g., “I apologize”). One of Guérin’s previous shows, *some mondegreens*, analogizes her paintings to the accidental mishearings of song lyrics. In *Shape Acts*, Guérin remixes a vocabulary of colors and solid forms into expansive visual rhythms. We get the sense that there are no true “mishearings” in those works—each angle and direction of viewing insists upon a different pattern of continuity and interruption, a new telling of familiar facts. And they are well worth a patient listen.