



Amanda Valdez. Shapes that remind you of something. Almost.

In talking about her new paintings—some painted directly on the wall at Greg Kucera Gallery that will stay for a long, unspecified time—Léonie Guyer pointed out that cave paintings weren't made in living rooms. Ancient artists worked in the depths of cave systems, the darkest, hardest-to-reach places, and getting there was part of the art. There was a faraway quality. Art was at the end of a tunnel, where you had to make your own light.

Several of Guyer's new paintings are black shapes visible on black grounds—tunnel's end. What your eye sees is a color something more like charcoal mixed with deepest lapis lazuli than abandoned iPhone screen, but wait, not if you get closer, and wait, not from that angle, and wait, if that's gray, then this must be black even though it didn't look black at first, and wait, is that green in there? Everything moves; the title is *Night walks on night*.

Guyer really likes *The Life of Forms in Art*, originally written by Henri Focillon in 1934. It takes up the question of how to determine what different forms mean or indicate at different times in history, and whether there are any observable absolutes. As Guyer echoed in her talk, his most stable conclusion was that "form is alive and the life of forms is a mystery."

Her forms appear in a field, on a white wall, say, or a black panel, like mystical Scrabble tiles. "It looks like a..."—that's what people say. The shapes are familiar but not the same as anything else. A tight dress? The twisting spine of a cat? A burglar tiptoeing off? Yes and no. The paintings are shifty. They're the lover out of reach, leaving you bewitched, bothered, and bewildered here at the other end of the tunnel.

An embrace, phew (and yet, you'll go back, too), waits in the next room of Kucera Gallery. Here are more small abstract paintings, by Lynne Woods Turner, very different but simpatico. They too have been made carefully and slowly and in layers and layers. They glow and buzz, the lines still warm from the hands that created them.

The oscillating lines coalesce into sharp strict shapes that turn out to be slightly irregular and unfixed when you look longer or closer. In this series, the lines often extend outward beyond the linen-covered panels and beyond you, toward the opening end of a tunnel. These geometries remind her of ribs and arms opened wide. Their scale has no bearing on their size; they're virtually boundless. She makes them little—only up to 14 inches on a side—so that they would never be larger than the torso of a friend. You draw in pretty close; everybody who sees them does.

There's a deep, wide variety of great female abstract artists across the region right now. Eleven were the focus of *Interior Margins* at Portland's Lumber Room in 2010, including Turner (of Portland), Guyer (San Francisco), and Victoria Haven (Seattle). They suffer no groupthink or stylistic trend. Where Guyer makes shapes floating in space, Turner uses shape to make spaces. Guyer uses dark, Turner light. Both do demonstrate how majestically soft even a hard line really is.

Add to this roster Amanda Valdez, born in Seattle, based in Brooklyn, having her first big Seattle solo at Prole Drift. Like Guyer, the infinitude of shapes is her lifelong subject. Each painting is a portrait of a shape, like a Chinese scholar's rock. Suggested by Guyer and relatable to Valdez: *Tantra Song*, a 2011 cult-favorite book about purity, a bus crash, and holy Tantric paintings from Rajasthan, India.

Valdez's new paintings are loud. Glimmering, drippy paintings on paper look like wet monster mouths. The colors are saturated, phosphorescent, hot. The artist describes two of her shapes, embroidered and painted on canvas, as "the deviant, slightly garish mascots" for the deviant, slightly garish show. It feels like the hot fat forms were scooped out of someone's insides.

That's how the artist feels about them, too. Since she was a child, she says, she's felt like specific shapes are floating around inside her, dislodged and demanding to be translated into two dimensions. (This idea reminds me of the late Brazilian artist Lygia Clark, who would have people reach into a dark bag to fondle her sculptures. Valdez, it turns out, works in New York for an artist who happens to be inspired by Clark, Janine Antoni.) Valdez thinks the shapes come from direct experience, sensations that break off into chunks: lying tangled up with someone in bed, pressing into a fellow passenger on a train, floating in an inner tube being partly in the water and partly in the sun and air. The quest to be precise about these things, most things, will take forever. In the gallery's back room, see Valdez's blue-bleeding, sun-dyed fabric Gemini constellation, and you become an object floating, too.