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Armando Guadalupe Cortés, installation view of "Dead Parrot Radio," 2025. Photo: Etienne Frossard, Courtesy Smack Mellon

Armando Guadalupe Cortés

December 9, 2025 by [Carina Martinez](#)

Brooklyn

[Smack Mellon](#)

Encountering Armando Guadalupe Cortés's "Dead Parrot Radio" ([on view](#) through December 14, 2025), it is easy, perhaps inevitable, to feel like something is flying right over your head. Indiscernible sounds of parrots and people calling out to one another fill Smack Mellon's

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feathers sways high from the ceiling toward the front and center of the space like a beckoning gesture. Cortés says that this flag, which visitors regularly misidentify as the Ukrainian flag, is a Kilo: a nautical signal that, when flown by a ship near another vessel, means “I wish to communicate with you.”

The artist, whose practice ranges from endurance performances to object-based installations, leans into such instances of misinterpretation. Drawn from family anecdotes, folkloric traditions, and personal experiences of living far away from his native Urequío—a rural farming community in Michoacán, Mexico—his current exhibition imbues each of his pieces with stories related to the tools and infrastructures on which interpersonal connectivity depends, across families, societies, and even species.

Standing tall at the entrance like a town-square monument, *Weefee* (all works 2025), a 16-foot-high, red-and-white-striped steel tower anchored by adobe, rebar, and taut wire cables, commemorates when the community first established reliable internet connection in 2023, making steady video-calling finally possible. Similarly, *La Busqueda* and *La Respuesta*, two sound works whose titles translate to “the search” and “the answer,” project through bullhorn speakers that reference Urequío’s most frequently used tool for disseminating information cross-town. From one side of the gallery, recordings of Cortés’s family members in the U.S. softly shout the names of those they cannot visit in Mexico because of legal status, while the chatter of his family’s pet parrots emanates from the opposite end of the space. Sometimes overlapping and other times out of sync, this indirect call-and-response evokes an atmosphere of quiet yearning, like two ships passing in the night.

Parrot and macaw feathers feature throughout the show and relate to Cortés’s experiences of living in various U.S. cities—Los Angeles, Austin, and Brooklyn—where these tropical birds thrive in large colonies outside of their natural habitat. The exhibition title originates from his time in the Ecuadorian Amazon, where the closest he came to seeing a parrot in the wild was stumbling upon a bundle of feathers on the forest floor, after the bird had been hunted as breakfast by a local villager. *Bodoquera*, a wooden blow dart gun resting on a plywood stage in the center of the room, holds the place of this memory, playfully activated by Cortés during an accompanying performance. Ceramic orbs covered in blue and yellow feathers are also dispersed throughout the space; one lodged inside *La Busqueda*’s speaker recalls a furball obstructing an animal’s throat.

Cortés’s work renders parrots not only as metaphors for migration and adaptability, but also as proxies for human connection. While their ability to replicate human speech raises questions for the artist about what is lost in translation, his work equally reveals what is found through deliberate acts of mistranslation and futile attempts to surmount the gulfs that exist between human and animal knowledge, life and death, here and there. Built around a web of stories that simultaneously converse with and misinterpret each other, “Dead Parrot Radio” is a bittersweet meditation on the desire to understand and be understood, the inevitability of communication breakdown, and the force of longing that pulls us together in spite of it.



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