

The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum

For Immediate Release

Aldrich Projects

ESTHER RUIZ: UNCHARTED

May 8 to September 2, 2024

Esther Ruiz's first solo museum presentation on the East Coast debuts new work including the first freestanding and largest to date sculpture in her *Beacon* series

The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum is pleased to announce Esther Ruiz's first solo museum presentation on the East Coast, *Uncharted*. Ruiz's presentation is the eighth installment of Aldrich Projects, a quarterly series featuring one work or a focused body of work by a single artist on the Museum's campus. Debuting new sculptures from her *Beacon* series alongside *Codex* (2023), these enigmatic objects consider the relationships between the natural and the artificial, the familiar and the alien, and the temporal and transcendental. *Esther Ruiz: Uncharted* will be on view May 8 to September 2, 2024.



Esther Ruiz, *Codex*, 2023, MDF, neon, red abalone, jasper, geode, rainbow aura quartz, sulfur, labradorite, epoxy clay, electronic components, paint, 24 x 38 x 6 inches, Courtesy the artist and CHART. Photo by Elisabeth Bernstein.

Predicated on both material and metaphysical investigations, the *Beacons*' hand-carved wooden forms are outfitted with bands of neon and embedded with an assortment of gemstones, geodes, organic matter, and found objects, including abalone mollusk shells and ammonite fossils. These eco-tokens are gifted by friends, found on walks, or bought at holistic supply stores.

Each *Beacon*, distinct in its style and shape, balances the wonders of the natural world with industrial materials such as concrete, epoxy, illuminated tubes, and commodity plastics. The result is a suite of whimsical yet complex structures that examine the dichotomy between visual perception and spiritual elevation, a concept that is reflected in the *Beacons*' title, which refers to both a navigational aid and a symbol of hope. The first series of *Beacons* culminated with the wall relief *Codex*, a work that invites a rethinking of material associations by arranging reduced elements in a data mapping format.

For *Uncharted*, Ruiz has also created *COMMU-1 Navigational Beacon*, the first freestanding sculpture and the largest to date in the *Beacon* series. Standing at nearly six feet tall, *COMMU-1* is a human-scaled capsule described by the artist as a "chamber for contemplation." Comprised of hinged halves, the pod's life force—wires, transformers, implanted crystals, terrestrial samples—is exposed to showcase the vessel's power supply. Sewn to the fuselage's exterior with steel wire are three large abalone shells surrounded by Phosphor-coated

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cobalt glass tubes filled with neon. At its core, *COMMU-1* conjures the spirit of exploration and meditation, sharing with the other *Beacons* the manifestation of Ruiz's intuition—a collision of the earthly and the boundless.

After college, Ruiz spent several years working at a neon studio in New York City, fabricating and installing lights for artists like Glenn Ligon and Tracey Emin, as well as for various commercial settings. This experience greatly shaped her methodology as all her lighting elements are manufactured by hand. In combining the formal language of Minimalism with the vivid colors of commerciality, Ruiz's practice builds upon the legacies of artists like Chryssa, Keith Sonnier, Ron Nagle, and James Turrell.

The exhibition will be accompanied by a 'zine.

Esther Ruiz (b. 1986, Houston, Texas) received a Bachelor of Arts in Studio Art from Rhodes College in 2011. Since relocating to New York that same year, she has shown nationally and internationally at various galleries with solo exhibitions at CHART in New York, NY; The Schneider Museum of Art, Ashland, OR; Reynolds Gallery, Richmond, VA; Monaco, St. Louis, MO; Platform, Baltimore, MD; and Brooklyn Academy of Music, Brooklyn, NY. She has also been featured in numerous group exhibitions including Tripoli Gallery, Wainscott, NY; CHART, New York, NY; Sobering Galerie, Paris; Deslave, Tijuana; LVL3, Chicago, IL; and the Torrance Art Museum, Torrance, CA, among others. She has also been a visiting artist at Smack Mellon, Brooklyn, NY; School of Visual Arts, New York, NY; Moore College of Art and Design, Philadelphia, PA; and Santa Barbara City College, Santa Barbara, CA, among others. Ruiz currently lives and works in Brooklyn, New York.

Esther Ruiz: Uncharted is curated by Curatorial and Publications Manager Caitlin Monachino.

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