

RUIZ-HEALY ART

Latinx, Latin America, & Texas Contemporary Art

Ruiz-Healy Art is pleased to present *Common Ground*, a solo exhibition of works by San Antonio artist Ashley Perez, on Wednesday, January 10th, with an opening reception from 6:00-8:00 PM. *Common Ground* will be on view at our San Antonio gallery through February 3rd, 2024. There will also be an artist walkthrough of the exhibition on January 13th, 2024, from 1:00-3:00 PM. This collection evolved from a year-long exploration of San Antonio's nature trails, where Perez engaged with individuals entering and exiting these curated natural spaces. This project was made possible with the generous support of the City of San Antonio's Department of Arts & Culture #GetCreativeSA.

Ashley Perez's work embodies connection through community, "I set up a table and posted a sign that said "free art" near trailheads and made small drawings of birds native to the area to give away to the brave souls who decided to talk to me." In creating this space, Perez collaborated with people from all walks of life, "I met friends consoling each other after a bad break up and groups of kids taking advantage of Pokémon Go's community hours. My favorite was a little girl and her grandmother. After I explained what I was interested in talking about, the grandmother had the girl list all the bugs and plants she saw and why she came." These stories, combined with Perez's reflections, guide each artwork. Perez's artistic expression comments on the ecological dynamics in South Texas through representations of native flora and fauna. The artist states, "Symbolic elements like circles and Coral snakes represent our connection to the earth and the regenerative state experienced while walking or biking."

Despite being paved, the trails that Perez utilized offered communities a chance to reconnect with nature's healing powers, even if just for an hour, something extraordinary after the COVID-19 pandemic, where people searched for an escape from the chaos that haunted 2020. "Each painting, drawing, or mixed media piece is an opportunity to reflect on my journey and explore how the natural world can help us better understand ourselves. Whether using a waterfowl to navigate a difficult memory or a hummingbird to encourage slowing down, my work is always infused with introspection and reflection." For *Waters*, Perez used an 1885 map of the Yanaguana River as a guide, "I marked its various curves with dust from an iron oxide rock I found on a bench. Each drawing is arranged like a clock and works to keep time and reference the life cycle of water, creating an overall meditative effect." Abstracted forms in atmospheric colors represent San Antonio's natural landscape and create rhythmic, harmonious forms that shape the exhibition.

Perez advocates for the vital role of "third spaces," otherwise understood as places beyond work or school that are free and accessible in the community. From a female perspective, these places offer a somewhat safe space to commune with nature because they are populated by other visitors, maintenance people, and park police. In these "third spaces," one may find noteworthy plants and animals that encourage a pause for closer observation or symbolic elements like circles and coral snakes, representing our connection to the earth and the regenerative state experienced while walking or biking.

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About the Artist

Ashley Perez is an artist based in San Antonio, Texas, who focuses on painting and drawing. Her work delves into themes of memory, identity, and mental health by combining elements of the natural world and playful language. Perez is a proud alumnus of SAY SÍ, a renowned creative youth development program that has won national awards. She earned her B.F.A. in painting from the University of Texas at San Antonio in 2010. Currently, she leads visual arts middle and high school programs at SAY Sí (San Antonio Youth Yes), where she nurtures the next generation of creative minds. Perez's artwork has been showcased at several prestigious institutions, including Centro de Artes, Blue Star Contemporary, and the McNay Art Museum. In 2019, she was awarded the National Association of Latino Art and Culture Fund for the Art Grant, and in 2020, she was selected for the Day of the Dead Calavera public art project. Her work and writing have been published in *Ofrenda Magazine* and *Super Present*.

About Ruiz-Healy Art

Founded in San Antonio, TX, in 2006, Ruiz-Healy Art represents an international roster of artists, emphasizing Latinx and Latin American artists and working with prominent Texas-based artists. Biculturalism and identity discourse are important in several artists we collaborate with. In the spring of 2019, we opened a gallery space in the Upper East Side of New York City that works in tandem with the gallery in San Antonio as a platform to disseminate the artist's work. The continuous investments in these under-represented areas have remained a longstanding signature of the gallery program. The gallery is recognized for its success in placing works by our artists in prestigious museum collections ranging from the Museum of Modern Art, New York, Whitney Museum of American Art, the Smithsonian Institution, the LA County Museum of Art, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Antonio Museum of Art, McNay Art Museum, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, and many others.