

ArtSeen

## EJ Hauser: *Grow Room*

By [Charles Schultz](#)

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EJ Hauser, *Untitled (Grow Room Series #7)*, 2023. Permanent marker on paper, 11 x 8.5 inches. Courtesy the artist and Derek Eller Gallery.

The edges of EJ Hauser paintings are mysterious places. Things occur on the periphery that one doesn't expect. Disjunctions in the system—the perceived order of the system—unsettle the composition. Those edges push in on the networks of marks that connect across the canvas, and this compression increases the force of visual impact. The potency has been boosted. You get the sense that qualities of lightness can arise from saturation, which seems like a paradox, like bringing the sun inside so plants can thrive beneath a roof. As the grow room technician might tell you, “so much depends upon a good electrical fow.”

Grow Room is the title of Hauser's new show, and it is laid out to let us see how one thing becomes another. A set of seven neatly framed drawings hangs in the narrow corridor between the gallery entrance and the exhibition room. The backside of Hauser's paper faces the viewer, so we see where the permanent marker Hauser used to make the drawings has bled through the page. These “bleed-throughs” are terrifically soft and gentle; the luster of the marker's ink is made mild and delicate by its passage through the page. The patterns of dashes and dots that gather into lines and cones have an intuitive quality, perhaps because of the sense of repetition in the mark making. All that seems premeditated is the effort, what results are the traces of spontaneity.

An especially fascinating aspect of Hauser’s practice derives from the relationship between their drawings and paintings. Patterns in the drawings recur in the paintings, sometimes with notable clarity, sometimes not. The fact that coordinating marks emerge in the drawings—are discovered in the act of making the drawings—and are then transported to the paintings leads to a notable shift in approach. The drawing *Untitled (Grow Room Series #7)* (2023) corresponds directly with Hauser’s painting *Golden Ticket* (2023–24), but the painting embodies the slowness of a built thing, whereas the drawing features the speed of revelation.



Installation view: EJ Hauser: *Grow Room*, Derek Eller Gallery, New York, 2024. Courtesy Derek Eller Gallery.

In several works Hauser incorporates a repeating pattern composed of shapes suggesting a comb, a cone, and a set of dots. It’s a fascinating and peculiar set of symbols. The arrangement is consistently precise, and most visible in the big *Dream Weaver* (2023–24), where Hauser is maxing-out the contrast between hot orange (in the background) and the dark, ultramarine blue of the pattern. It occurs twice more—in *Eden’s Delight* and *Blue Mountain Fire* (both 2023–24)—at a smaller scale. Its evident significance to the artist is only amplified by its enigmatic quality.

Triangular shapes like cones of light also populate several of the works. When they are grouped together, as in *Purple Stardawg* (2023–24), the shapes suggest a peculiar comradery that recalls the packs of lions—the “silver voyagers”—from Hauser’s previous exhibition at Derek Eller. When Hauser makes the triangles a bit squatter and adds a lean, one can’t help but see the floppy hoods of Philip Guston’s paintings going about their ominous business. There is a sense of play in Hauser’s practice that meets the courageousness necessary to make choices that can’t be taken back. Tension builds from the energy created in that relationship. You feel it when you look at the layers of any given painting, but—for me—the feeling peaks with the triangles.



EJ Hauser, *Slazerbeam*, 2023-2024. Acrylic on canvas, 20 x 16 inches. Courtesy the artist and Derek Eller Gallery.

The gallery literature reveals two points of interest: the titles of the paintings are all derived from strains of marijuana, and the painting *Slazerbeam* (2023–24) includes a patch of green “weather.” From the first point we can ascertain the kind of grow room the artist has in mind, and from the second we’re given an oblique indication of how the artist thinks about their work. Of course, the two points are also somewhat at odds—there is no weather in a grow room. But in the grow room of the mind, the grow room that is the artist’s studio, the grow room of conversation amongst friends, there is always weather to consider. And if the weather gets heavy, spending some time with *Slazerbeam* might lighten the atmosphere.

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