

Edyta Hul at SLAG&RX

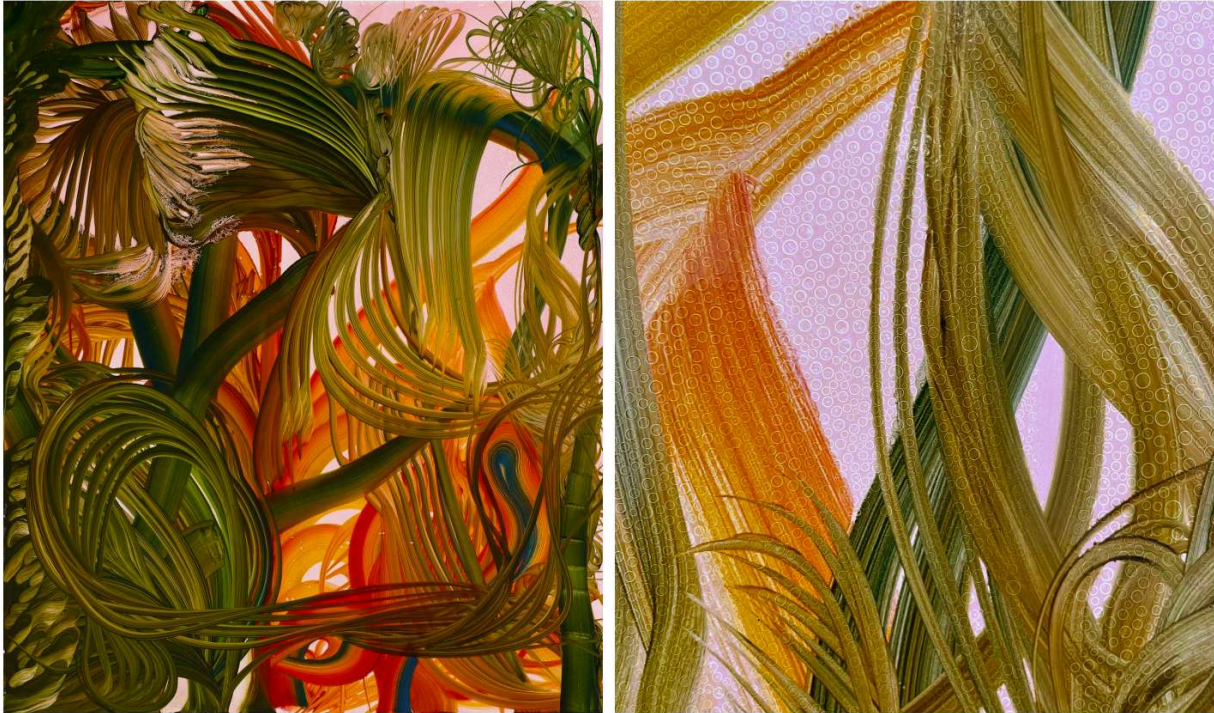
Auden Mucher

January 30, 2025



Installation view, *Edyta Hul: Density of the Spell* at SLAG&RX.
Photo courtesy of the artist and SLAG&RX.

Edyta Hul's botanical fantasy, *Density of the Spell*, features large paintings that suggest suspended moments from within an underwater forest, where elaborate networks of fronds and stems appear to be undulating in a stirring sea. In this, her first US solo exhibition, the Polish artist presents 19 paintings that encompass seemingly endless variations of this evocative submarine garden. An introductory group of large works in a side room serves as a primer for the expansive array of similarly scaled pieces (ranging from 35 by 31 to 79 by 59 inches) displayed in the airy main gallery. A closer examination of their surfaces reveals detailed textures and elegant brushwork that form the fundamental armature of her imaginative realm.



Edyta Hul, *Altar*, 2024. Oil and enamel on canvas, 51 × 43 in. (130 × 110 cm).
Photo courtesy of the artist and SLAG&RX; detail (right) photo Auden Mucher.

The subtle dimensionality of each of these process-oriented works results from the artist's layering technique of sanding between countless coats of enamel and varnish. I was particularly struck by the pattern of small rings resembling cephalopod tentacles found within the delicate surfaces of many pieces. The resulting images are dynamic and ethereal. Hul builds depth by further layering, composing flowing plants with feathery, hairlike, multicolored brushstrokes through painterly gestures of full body movement. Enlivening the compositions even more, wispy, thread-like strands add delicacy to the overall scene. The effect is a complex but balanced system of variegated and entangled leaves, branches, and stems.

The installation in the main gallery, surrounding viewers with these works, serves to amplify the lush, leafy imagery and dense canopies of algae. Here, the paintings become windows into a fantastical kelp grove, as if the gallery itself were situated along the continental shelf of the Baltic Sea. Each of Hul's imaginative plants flow gracefully within the confines of the canvas but nevertheless evoke an infinite habitat far beyond the picture plane.



Edyta Hul, *Untitled*, 2024. Oil and enamel on canvas, 71 × 63 in. (180 × 160 cm).
Photo courtesy of the artist and SLAG&RX.

In each work, Hul balances the foreground and background in a non-hierarchical way so that the eye cannot fully rest on any one area. This stylistic device poses a subtle challenge to the opportunistic gaze that usually falls upon our natural systems, as there is no single item for us to extract. One untitled piece particularly demonstrates her compositional prowess by the diagonal separation of the sinuous life forms into different shades of understated greens. This palette is more grounded than some of the extraordinary color choices elsewhere in the show, but the predominately soft pink background, with its subtle variations and textures, warms the entire composition. An unexpected deep blue arc presses into the middle of the picture plane as if to remind viewers that we are observing a plausible realm that harbors incongruous elements just slightly outside of reality.



Edyta Hul, *Mirage*, 2024. Oil and enamel on canvas, 67 × 51 in. (170 × 130 cm).
Photo courtesy of the artist and SLAG&RX.

Another standout is *Mirage*, an almost analogous pink and orange composition, featuring an intricate ribbonlike frond at the top right corner that conveys stunning effects of light and shadow. Many of the plants in this piece begin to droop, as if the lively green flora in her other paintings will gracefully age and languish like these. There's resilience in biodiversity, but these works also reflect the cyclical nature of life. The warmth of seasoned chlorophyll reaches Hul's otherworldly sea, just as it does here on earth, and I find myself trying to hold onto something that feels at risk of being lost.

Edyta Hul: Density of the Spell at SLAG&RX, New York from January 11 to February 8, 2025.

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