

Elif Saydam: Hospitality

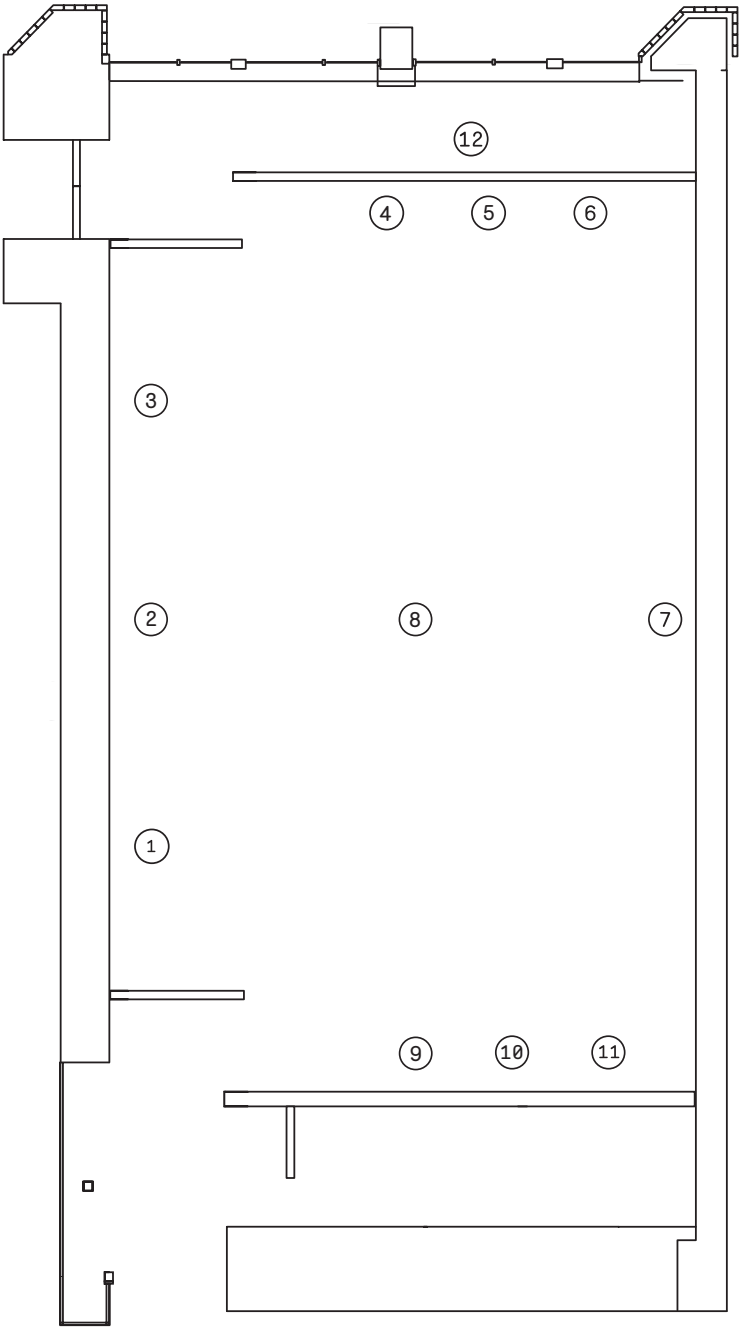
OCT 18 – DEC 14, 2024

AUDAIN GALLERY

## List of Works

1.  
*The Line for Leyla is Long*, 2024  
Japanese tinted silverleaf, 22karat, 23karat goldleaf, oil and cold wax medium on found toilet stall doors (c. 1920s, Manhattan)  
60 x 28 x 2 inches
2.  
*Mejnun Finds Relief*, 2024  
Japanese tinted silverleaf, 22karat, 23karat goldleaf, oil and cold wax medium on found toilet stall doors (c. 1920s, Manhattan)  
60 x 27.5 x 2 inches
3.  
*Unhinged*, 2024  
21karat, 22karat, 23karat goldleaf, oil and cold wax medium on linen  
60 x 28 x 1 inches
4.  
*Nausea (I)*, 2024  
Oil on linen  
11 x 8.5 inches
5.  
*Nausea (II)*, 2024  
Oil on linen  
11 x 8.5 inches
6.  
*Nouveau Riche*, 2024  
Modelling paste, plastic spoon, stickers, 23karat goldleaf and oil on linen  
12 x 8.5 inches
7.  
*Goodbye to Berlin (After Isherwood)*, 2024  
Laminated inkjet print edition, florist paper, ribbon, magnets  
17 x 12 inches
8.  
*Hospitality*, 2024  
Laminated inkjet prints, zinc-coated rings  
dimensions variable
9.  
*Myopia (I)*, 2024  
Oil on linen  
11 x 8.5 inches
10.  
*Old Money*, 2024  
Modelling paste, plastic spoon, 23karat goldleaf and oil on linen  
11 x 8.5 inches
11.  
*Myopia (II)*, 2024  
Oil on linen  
11 x 8.5 inches
12.  
*My Condolences, My Congratulations*, 2024  
Fresh flowers, silk flowers, metal and wood armatures, fabric, paper, printed banners with excerpts from Nizami Ganjavi's *Haft Peykar* (1197)  
dimensions variable

Exhibition Map



## Exhibition Text

Elif Saydam's multi-dimensional painting practice examines the ideological forces that scaffold and shape aesthetic taste. Drawing on histories of ornamentation outside the European canon, Saydam challenges gendered, classist, and Orientalist assumptions about decoration—which are rife with connotations of frivolity, femininity, and excess—to entangle traditional miniature painting techniques with queer iconography, camp, and references to contemporary popular culture.

The anchor point in *Hospitality*, an exhibition of entirely new work, is a sequence of three highly detailed paintings. Two of these are realized on reclaimed lavatory-stall doors and the third is rendered, trompe l'oeil style, on linen. The doors' origins in the 1920s is portentous for Saydam, as it was a period when carefree consumption throughout the West, masquerading as "freedom," obscured an ominous slide into fascism. One hundred years later, the artist observes, and our current geopolitical climate feels unsettlingly similar. Saydam's sumptuous and labour-intensive surface embellishment confounds the vulgarity of the doors' original purpose as toilet dividers, and at the same time offers a playful nod to more transgressive acts taking place behind semi-closed doors, such as cruising, crying, or slacking off.

Installed three in a row in the gallery, the doors also reference the long-running American television game show "Let's Make a Deal," where contestants are asked to choose between a trio of closed doors. Behind one lies a highly covetable reward ("a new car!"), while the other two conceal worthless booby prizes ("you've won jewelry made of bacon!"). Like the painted doors themselves (two of them "real," and the third a "fake") the contestants' conundrum to select the correct door highlights for Saydam what cultural theorist Lauren Berlant has described as "cruel optimism," the

societal condition that systematically ensures our desires actually obstruct our ability to thrive. As Berlant describes, “people have remained attached to unachievable fantasies of the good life—with its promises of upward mobility, job security, political and social equality, and durable intimacy—despite evidence that liberal-capitalist societies can no longer be counted on to provide opportunities for individuals to make their lives ‘add up to something.’” Here, however, it is unclear which threshold holds the most promise. As is often the case in Saydam’s work, exuberant facades overlay troubled questions about contemporary society, historical violence, and collective grief.

The door is a deeply ambivalent symbol for Saydam, suggesting both promised happiness and its impossibility, hospitality (when open) and hostility (when closed). Alongside the painted doors and a series of smaller works, Saydam presents an installation of laminated, transparent prints as a spatial interruption, suspended throughout the space to create rooms, hallways, and liminal thresholds. Through this repetition, a door can suggest an escape route, whether real or imagined, and therefore the possibility of an otherwise life. Doors can also be approached as devices through which to consider the complex web of relations between hosts and guests, a condition especially present in this exhibition’s context upon unceded and ancestral Indigenous territories of the Northwest Coast, as well as, more broadly, within global discourses around settler-colonialism today.

Saydam’s installation of floral wreaths in the gallery’s Hastings Street windows further extends their inquiry into the rich entanglement of social decorum with decoration. This cultural form, referred to as *çelenk* in Turkish, *تاج گل* in Farsi and *花环* in Chinese, is familiar to many diasporic communities the world over.

While typically serving as markers of celebration, accomplishment, and well-wishing (commonly gifted at wedding ceremonies or the launch of a new business), the same flower arrangements are also exchanged in a funeral context, to mourn and commemorate the dead. Whether circular, teardrop- or heart-shaped, arranged with commonplace or exotic flora, festooned with ribbon banners, and trimmed with cheap organza or foil, their near infinite variation is for Saydam an example of the astounding agility of ornamentation. Traveling across time and space, carrying sometimes resolutely specific cultural expressions but simultaneously adapting to new contexts as it moves, the decorative remains a powerful vehicle of community resilience, and a jubilant declaration of survival.

A parallel publication, with texts by Sanabel Abdelrahman, Onur Çimen, and José Segebre, illustrations by graphic artist Ahmad Nabil, designed by Rosen Eveleigh and co-published with Publication Studio Vancouver, will be launched at the close of the exhibition.

Organized by SFU Galleries, with generous support from Franz Kaka, Toronto.

## Biography

Through an expanded painting practice, Turkish-Canadian artist Elif Saydam uses the language of ornamentation and decoration to rearrange systems of valuation and emphasis. Recent solo and group exhibitions include *A Crack We Sprout Through* at SANATORIUM (Istanbul); *it's not you it's me* at Sentiment (Zürich); *Stealth* at Galerie Rüdiger Schöttle (Munich); *Half Life* at Franz Kaka (Toronto); *Eviction Notice* at Oakville Galleries Gairloch Gardens (Ontario); *Cleaning up the Neighborhood* at All Stars (Lausanne); *Lose Enden* at Kunsthalle Bern (Bern); *F\*rgiveness* at Tanya Leighton (Berlin); and *...schläft sich durch* at Kunstverein Harburger Bahnhof (Hamburg). Saydam's first monograph *TWO CENTS* was published in 2022 with Mousse Publishing (Italy) and they frequently collaborate on interdisciplinary text-based projects with other artists and writers. Saydam is the recipient of the Hessische Kulturstiftung Atelier Stipendium in New York City for 2024/25, where they are researching Camp aesthetics as an emancipatory tool for diasporic survival and political imagination. Saydam lives and works in Berlin.

## Artist Acknowledgements

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## Events

### Opening Reception:

Thursday, October 17, 7–9 PM  
Audain Gallery

Elif Saydam in Conversation with Brendan Lee Satish Tang  
Saturday, October 19 / 4 – 530PM  
Audain Gallery

Director's Tours  
Saturday, October 26 / 2PM  
Saturday, November 9 / 2PM  
Audain Gallery

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Denny Walter, *Iznik: The Artistry of Ottoman Ceramics*. London: Thames, 2014.

Situated in Vancouver and Burnaby, SFU Galleries occupies the unceded territories of x̱m̱əθkw̱əy̱əm, Skwxwú7mesh, Səḻḻw̱ətał, and ḵʷiḵʷəx̱əm Nations. Acknowledging that the activities of SFU Galleries unfold on colonized Indigenous territories is both a recognition that settler colonialism is an ongoing structure and a commitment to support the capacity of art to unsettle these conditions.

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