

ENG

Elif Saydam
Saving Nine
14.06.2025 – 03.08.2025



The faggots and their friends and the women who love women can, they begin to know, stop and do no-thing. That is something for them to do.
– Larry Mitchell, *The Faggots & Their Friends Between Revolutions* (1977)

The roof of this 200-year-old barn that is Kunsthalle Thy has been imprinted onto canvas through a rust-dyeing technique to record its structure and materiality. This is the first timestamp of *Saving Nine* and the basis of Elif Saydam's invitation for collective labor. The exhibition will undergo several transformations under their guidance and result in a collaborative artwork. This piece will remain at the service of the institution for future gatherings.

Dyeing, stitching, eating, cutting, chatting, sipping... These are some of the activities open to participants. The roof-imprint becomes a backdrop for banners hanging in the space, which are meant to be chopped up into smaller pieces and repurposed. These panels will then be quilted in the first workshops of the exhibition, presented with a larger cloth which records a *mehmuni* – a Farsi word for “party” – on June 21, 2025. This solstice gathering will be archived through cyanotype, a printing-technique using light-sensitive pigments. The shapes of guests, cups, plates, cutlery and their movements will be recorded in dark blues. This is *Saving Nine*'s second timestamp: a textile that abstracts and remembers the act of hosting, conflating the movements of things, guests and friends alike.

Such a moment of doing-together entails – and this is specific to Saydam's machinations in the expanded field of painting – the time-consuming, skill-adept and excessive work of decorating. Usually understood as superfluous adornment and reviled as feminine and oriental, decoration requires staying with something, doing and undoing, tracing and retracing, trying and adjusting, keeping in mind the stitches to come. These repetitive activities whose utilitarian value tends to escape us are ways of spending time in community.

Both the roof-imprint and cyanotypes function like timekeepers. They record the hours of the many involved. The idea is to hold time between one's fingers and then share it with others through stitching patches into a larger whole. It reminds of the *AIDS Memorial Quilt* (1985-ongoing), a large blanket of panels commemorating victims of the AIDS pandemic that exists today as one of the largest collectively made artworks in the world. These works share the intensity that is the urgency of coming together in grief once the damage is done.

The exhibition title speaks to the smallness of belated action. It is inspired by the proverb *a stitch in time saves nine* which advocates for immediate action. The show does not fully reproduce this normative economy of activity, and instead invites us to do and redo so much that spending time together is the goal. The simplicity of this observation risks misrecognizing the ethics of Saydam's intervention. Through their focus on the laborious repetition of minor actions – stitches being the smallest unit of needlework – the supposed banality of decorative cultural expression becomes the in and out of repair. In order to save nine we must *do*, now together.

This reparative quality is implied in stitching as a verb denoting mending and conjoining that is also emblematic of another feature of Saydam's practice, exemplified in the show's title and techniques: Their insistence on vernacular everyday forms of knowing that bind us together like stitches. The commitment to decoration and ornament, the reappraisal of craft in

communal structures of care and the bodies leaving blurred and abstracted cyanite traces without identifiable markers constitute the aesthetic and political coordinates of *Saving Nine*.

In times marked by state terrorism, the narcissism of small differences, its complicity with normative social orderings and debilitating narratives of collapse, the works offer a brief moment of respite. Saydam invites us to pull a thread or two. The imprints of our bodies rendered illegible by abstraction are grounded in our shared labor. We are invited to make and unmake over tea and sweets, gifts and words. The artist and their friends, to adapt lines well-known to Saydam, do no-thing. This is the third timestamp of *Saving Nine* and something for us to do.

– José Segebre

CV

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 *List Projects 32* på MIT (Cambridge), *RAUS* at Franz Kaka (Toronto); *Hospitality* at Audain, Simon Fraser University Galleries (Vancouver); *A Crack We Sprout Through* at SANATORIUM (Istanbul); *it's not you it's me* at Sentiment (Zürich); *Stealth* at Galerie Rüdiger Schöttle (Munich); *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 lives and works between Berlin, Germany, and İzmir, Türkiye.

Kunsthall Thy is supported by:

