

List Projects 32: Elif Saydam

June 5 - August 31, 2025

Bakalar Gallery



Exhibition view: *List Projects 32: Elif Saydam*, MIT List Visual Arts Center, 2025. Photo: Julia Featheringill

Berlin-based artist Elif Saydam conceives of painting as a space for the projection of fantasy.

Throughout history, many painting traditions have served the fantasies of a state or an imperial court, but Saydam's approach emphasizes eros in the textures of everyday life. In their paintings, quotidian sites, including gas stations, apartment blocks, and convenience stores, are layered with gold and ornament, suggesting the persistence of fantasy—particularly the desires of precarious urban populations—in increasingly gentrifying and financialized cities.

Saydam's paintings are rich with references to the history of the medium, particularly so-called "minor" genres like miniature painting and illuminated manuscripts. Their textual sources are equally eclectic, ranging from twelfth-century Persian poetry and Larry Mitchell's *The Faggots and Their Friends Between Revolutions* (1977) to the slogans of contemporary social movements. Saydam also experiments with painting on unconventional surfaces and supports, including antique bathroom stall doors, anti-shoplifting mirrors, and kitchen sponges.

For their List Projects exhibition, the artist presents four large, multi-panel paintings that employ the vernacular geometric motif of the brick. Its references range from art-historical works by figures like Martin Wong and Philip Guston to social history, such as the Stonewall riots, and architecture across different geographies. In Saydam's practice, the brick is an open-ended object that signifies possibilities of both isolation and connection, blockage and porousness. "Partitions are predetermined and embedded in our lives in ways we can't control," they have reflected. "I'm not trying to pry anything apart but rather seeing what kind of glances can be stolen from an obstructed view."

List Projects 32: Elif Saydam is organized by Zach Ngin, Curatorial Assistant, with Natalie Bell, Chief Curator.

Elif Saydam (b. 1985, Calgary, Canada) is a painter based in Berlin, Germany. They studied at Concordia University in Montreal, Canada, and Städelschule, Frankfurt am Main, Germany. They have recently had solo exhibitions at Simon Fraser University Galleries, Vancouver; Oakville Galleries, Toronto; Kunstverein Harburger Bahnhof, Hamburg; Galerie Rüdiger Schöttle, Munich; and Tanya Leighton, Berlin. They have been included in group exhibitions at Sanatorium, Istanbul; Kunsthalle Bern, Switzerland; Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt; and Helena Anrather, New York. Their first monograph, *Elif Saydam: TWO CENTS*, was published by Mousse in 2022.

Sponsors

Exhibitions at the List Center are made possible with the support of Audrey & James Foster and Cynthia & John Reed.

General operating support is provided by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the Council for the Arts at MIT, Philip Khoury and Office of the Vice Provost, Dean Hashim Sarkis and the MIT School of Architecture + Planning, the Mass Cultural Council, and many generous individual donors. The Advisory Board Members of the List Visual Arts Center are gratefully acknowledged.