

List Projects 32: Elif Saydam
Bakalar Gallery
June 5 – August 31, 2025



March 11, 2025, Cambridge, MA – The MIT List Visual Arts Center is pleased to announce *List Projects 32: Elif Saydam*, the artist's first institutional solo exhibition in the United States. Featuring a selection of materially inventive paintings – including wax-dyed canvases and paintings on sponges and security mirrors – the exhibition reflects Saydam's ongoing exploration of social hierarchies, decorative aesthetics, and the everyday textures of urban existence. By combining cast-off material with overtly decorative embellishment, Saydam blurs the line between ornamentation and function, critique and celebration. *List Projects 32* will be on view at the List Center June 5 - August 31, 2025.

Saydam engages in an expanded painting practice that incorporates elements of ornamentation, humor, and socio-political critique. Their work draws from traditions such as miniature painting and illuminated manuscripts while foregrounding contemporary

metropolitan sites—particularly the späti, Berlin’s ubiquitous late-night convenience stores. In these spaces, precarious populations intermingle with gentrifying forces, creating dynamic pockets of resistance to the homogenization of cities.

“Elif Saydam’s work conceives painting as a site for projection of fantasy: not only the fantasies of power and history that have historically preoccupied with medium, but the kinds of mundane romance and political longing that we encounter in daily life,” says Ramona Ngin, Curatorial Assistant. “We are thrilled to be bringing their work to audiences in Boston and beyond in their first U.S. solo show.”

For *List Projects 32*, Saydam will present four large multi-panel paintings that employ the repetitive geometric motif of the brick. In their work, the brick is an open-ended figure that signifies possibilities of both isolation and connection, blockage and porousness. Their references range from art historical figures like Martin Wong and Philip Guston, to histories of the brick in postcolonial and vernacular architecture globally. All of these paintings were partially made using wax dying, also known as batik – a technique that accompanied trade routes from Southeast Asia to the Ottoman Empire, Persia, and West Africa. And rather than a single stretched canvas, some have quilted and sewn pieces of fabric as their support, the result of a labor-intensive English paper piecing technique Saydam uses.

In these paintings – as in much of Saydam’s work – historical and material inquiries are layered with moments of adornment, vulnerability, and humor. In *Beusselstrasse 17 10553 Alt Moabit* (2022–23), for instance, a stark grid of cinder blocks is overlaid with photographic transfers of doorknobs from Saydam’s apartment building in Berlin. *THIS TENDER THAT RENT* (2022–23) is freshly adorned with graffiti-like gold hearts every time it is exhibited; these spray-painted flourishes bleed off the canvas onto the surrounding wall.

Saydam’s larger brick-motif works are joined by new works from their security-mirror series, which recontextualizes the reflective medium typically used for anti-shoplifting surveillance in retail settings. Some of these works are painted with a latticed star pattern, referencing geometric ornamentations that recur in Islamic architecture, while others feature textures drawn from popular material culture, such as 1980s stickers and plastic faux-ceramic souvenirs. These works have been installed at both standard picture height and near the ceiling, reflecting the uneasy interplay between visibility, power, and consumer culture. Saydam will also present a small painting on a kitchen sponge – representative of their longstanding practice of adorning everyday objects and scenes with meticulously painted ornament.



List Projects 32: Elif Saydam is curated by Ramona Ngin, Curatorial Assistant, with Natalie Bell, Curator.

LIST PROJECTS 32: ELIF SAYDAM

June 5 - August 31, 2025

Bakalar Gallery, at The List Visual Arts Center

20 Ames Street, Bldg. E15-109

Cambridge, Massachusetts 02139

617-253-4680

listart.mit.edu

IMAGE CAPTIONS T-B

Elif Saydam, *THIS TENDER THAT RENT*, 2022–23. Installation view: *Elif Saydam: Eviction Notice*, Oakville Galleries at Gairloch Gardens. Image courtesy the artist, Tanya Leighton Gallery, Berlin, and Oakville Galleries. Photo: LFDdocumentation

Elif Saydam, *Queer Banking for Everybody*, 2022. 23k gold, varnish, and oil paint on gessoed kitchen sponge, 2 3/4 x 4 5/16 x 3/4 in. Image courtesy the artist and Franz Kaka, Toronto. Photo: Joanna Wilk Art Documentation

MEDIA CONTACT

DEPARTMENT PR

Sarah Brown McLeod

sarah@department-pr.com

Roberta Zertuche

roberta@department-pr.com

ABOUT ELIF SAYDAM

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

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ABOUT LIST PROJECTS

Started in 2013, List Projects is a series of focused exhibitions supporting emerging and underrepresented artists at pivotal points in their careers through responsive curatorial programming. This platform provides audiences with a first view of topical and thought-provoking work, amplified through programming that connects artistic content with academic scholarship, research, and experimentation in other fields at MIT. List Projects are presented three times a year in the compact Bakalar Gallery, an ideal space for exhibiting a singular concept, artwork, or installation. List Projects exhibitions allow for swift curatorial responses to developments in contemporary art, supporting emerging artists in their first institutional exhibitions, established artists whose work is under-recognized or taking a critical change of direction, artists without gallery representation, and lesser-known artists working in film, video, or sound.

ABOUT MIT LIST VISUAL ARTS CENTER

The List Visual Arts Center, MIT's contemporary art museum, collects, commissions, and presents rigorous, provocative, and artist-centric projects that engage MIT and the global art community. As the contemporary art museum at MIT, the List Center has three gallery spaces where curators present a dynamic program of six to nine contemporary exhibitions annually. Typically, the List Center offers an artist their first museum solo presentation. Exhibitions are accompanied by a broad range of educational programs for the public and the MIT community, special events, and scholarly publications. The galleries and all programs are free and open to the public. Beyond exhibitions and programs, the List Center also maintains MIT's permanent art collection which includes the Institute's Public Art Collection, the Student Lending Collection, and the Campus Lending Collection.