

FRIEZE

Elif Saydam Articulates Neighbourhood Aesthetics

At Oakville Galleries in Gairloch Gardens, the artist's multimedia works communicate the visual language where immigrant, queer and artist communities overlap



Often seen as interlopers to white, middle-class order, immigrant, queer and artist communities commonly overlap in neighbourhoods where rents are affordable. There, negotiated space tends to settle into a precarious but pluralistic visual language: schmaltz meets camp. In 'Eviction Notice', their first major exhibition in Canada, Elif Saydam articulates this aesthetic to a tee: a cartoonish vortex of hearts, apples, dollar signs and dark plums swallows the familiar signage of a local late-night shop in Berlin (*Losing my License*, 2023). Bows and garlands adorn the black and white image of a local convenience store in Oakville, an 'open' sign glowing red in its window (*Bong's Variety, Oakville, Canada*, 2023). Altogether, these kitschy, overly decorated images gesture towards an excess of labour, time and effort, but also towards affection, authenticity and radical potential.

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Tanya Leighton



Elif Saydam, *THIS TENDER THAT RENT*, 2023, installation view. Courtesy: the artist and Oakville Galleries in Gairloch Gardens; photograph: Laura Findlay

As a queer Turkish-Canadian artist who has been living in Germany for the past decade, Saydam integrates parts of their lived history and understanding of public space into the very structure of the exhibition. In the large, five-panel work *Beusselstraße 17 10553 Alt Moabit* (2022–23), pieces of canvas and linen are hand-stitched into geometric blocks, interspersed with doorknobs and miniature store signs, which bring to mind the tightly coded, mid-career compositions of Martin Wong, who also lovingly depicted cities and their subcultures. In *THIS TENDER THAT RENT* (2022–23), interconnected words comment on community relations, simultaneously transactional and warm: does it read ‘rent’, or ‘tender’? The surfaces evoke the decorative motif of Turkish tiling – lovingly, if perhaps surprisingly, embraced by the German public since Turkish immigrants first arrived in the 1960s – while reddish-brown linen and canvas combine tie-dyed and stencilled surfaces covered in graffiti hearts that bleed onto the decorative edges of the gallery walls.

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Elif Saydam, 'Eviction Notice', 2023, exhibition view. Courtesy: the artist and Oakville Galleries in Gairloch Gardens; photograph: Laura Findlay

The ornate interior and exterior of the gallery is integrated into the exhibition in other ways, too. Oakville is a wealthy suburb of working-class Toronto that inherits some telltale signs of its diverse upbringing: evidence of a struggling working class shines through its perfectly WASP-y exterior. In a counteractive gesture, Saydam has perched a series of anthropomorphic, hand-blown spoons – made in collaboration with glass artist Ebba von Wachenfeldt – on the windowsill, lounging between empty juice boxes and drinks cans like bored teenagers ('The Loiterers', all 2023). Manicured gardens peek through *Closed for Good* and *Open Forever* (both 2022–23), compositions of laminated inkjet prints that are connected by rings to form translucent, printed curtains. Walking through the portal-like *Wanna Live in a World Where* (2023) toward the neighbouring rose gardens, I realize that the plastic panes form the sentence 'Even weak links in the chain are links in the chain' – a quote from Larry Mitchell's epic fantasy novel and manifesto of queer communal living, *The Faggots and Their Friends Between Revolutions* (1977).