

Tanya Leighton

Mousse Magazine

Mousse 71 TIDBITS

Working Nine to Five Five Five: Elif Saydam



1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15

Elif Saydam, *Selling* installation view at Mélange, Cologne, 2020
Courtesy: the artist and Mélange, Cologne

Elif Saydam's work speaks to the duty of toil under capitalism, as well as to some darker, obsessive, and self-imposed impulse to express and expend. In her small paintings and huge quilts, the riot grrrl meets the cowboy meets the rarefied Oriental miniature in an enigmatic web of reflections on labor, restlessness, and the production of individuality.

Mousse Magazine, March 2020

Kurfürstenstraße 156, 10785 Berlin
+49 (0)30 21 972 220, info@tanyaleighton.com, www.tanyaleighton.com

Tanya Leighton

the fake area code reserved for Hollywood movies, 555. (Don't bother calling them.) The production of selves, whether one's own or offspring, is the subject of both suspicion and longing through-out Saydam's output. The exhibition at Mélange is called *Selfing*—what self-fertilizing mushrooms do—and is accompanied by a text written by the artist, in which she imagines a time after the extinction of all winged pollinators, when "Honey" is what you call someone "who went away and left you forever, who broke your heart," and artists have taken over the delicate work of pollination. Also playing with this sentiment, the *Mutter Natur* (2019) quilt centers on a sad-looking turtle in heels, walking away from the beach where she was supposed to lay eggs. She is at once the queer whose life does not follow the trajectory of heteronormative reproduction, the teen who irons a melting globe onto their jeans in a struggle to come to terms with the wrecked future ahead, and anyone else who fails to be productive because life just feels too heavy. Saydam's work manages to speak from a position where these are both comedic postures and earnest portrayals of the natural entanglement of the Anthropocene apocalypse with personal struggles and small disappointments.

For her first upcoming show at Rüdiger Schöttle, Saydam has made a group of enormous fabric works. Hundreds if not thousands of little hexagons are meticulously stitched together to make an approximately two-by-three-meter quilt in which four passe-partouts of differently marbled fabrics frame, like the circles of Dante's hell, two identical but mirrored images of a lower body, resting in white crocks and mint scrubs. Basically, someone is taking a break—but beyond that straightforward representation, because the quilting technique is especially complicated, and the pieces especially huge: What's at stake here is also the labor that went into the making itself. However, more pressing than this sound concern with workers' rights, I'd wager, is the sinister and ambivalent impulse for which it is covering. Why stitch till you bleed? And, recalling hide-like denim works installed like medieval torture devices, why stretch yourself to breaking? These works are about saying one thing but being another, and the tremendous force sparked by this contradiction. "Don't know why I have to / Don't know why I can't" it reads in a *Goosebumps* font around the frame of the white crocks. "Don't know," yet here are six square meters of testimony to an endurance of fantastic proportions. Humans toil like dragons spew fire, but when the purpose of all that toil is put into question, the beast begins to stir. Saydam's massive quilt is a dragon, flapping its wings at its captors and yanking its chain.

Elif Saydam (b.1985, Calgary) studied Fine Arts at Concordia University, Montréal (2009), and with Monica Baer / Amy Sillman at the Städelschule, Frankfurt. Recent solo exhibitions include: *Selfing*, Mélange, Cologne (2020); *What me worry*, Stadium, Berlin (2019); and *La Belle Dame sans Merci*, Franz Kaka, Toronto (2019). Group shows and performances include: *Von Fleisch und Zucker*, Montez Press Radio, Hamburg (2019); *Fair*, Kölnischer Kunstverein, Cologne (2019); and *Telephone: Miss St's Hieroglyphic Suffering*, KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin (2018).

by Kristian Vistrup Madsen