



## Elif Saydam BERLIN

A spray of suspended cicada exuviae traced a steep upward arc from the nozzle of an aerosol can on the floor of Franz Kaka gallery in Toronto. It looked

troublingly as though they were being emitted by the insecticide. "Gross," I thought, quickly scrolling past images of that work from Elif Saydam's 2019 show. Yet the line between beauty and pestilence is an unstable one in Saydam's practice, and the artist's negotiation of contradictions such as this lends her mixed-media works an abiding allure.

Take *Daily stretch* (2019), shown in her subsequent solo exhibition "What me worry" at Stadium, Berlin. On a curtain of acetate sheets held together by steel rings, cartoon worms form block letters that read *mund/hand/fuss* (mouth/hand/foot). In between the words are laminated detritus, from plastic bags and shed snakeskin to lucky four-leaf clovers. The work's non-sequitur air belies deeper considerations on the tension between the artificial and the organic, and how we ascribe symbolic worth to what's underfoot.

The question of value is articulated in terms of cultural production in *Artists* (2019), a series of Ottoman-miniature-inspired works featuring ornate fountains rendered in oil and gold leaf. In each painting, the "artists" appear to be represented by cartoon bugs. One insect is shown playing a slot machine (no

dice), hinting that art-making is a gamble. Not one that tends to pay off, we might surmise, based on the sardonic dejection that emanates from *Hotline* (2019), inkjet transfers imitating flyers with phone numbers that begin with 555—the sign of a non-operational number reserved for use in film and television across North America. Slogans such as "Are you crushworthy???" "Find out now," illustrated with



ELIF SAYDAM, *Daily stretch* (detail), 2019, laminated plastic bags, plastic net, four-leaf clovers, molted snake skin, and inkjet prints on acetate, 220 × 93 × 4.5 cm. Courtesy the artist and Stadium, Berlin.

images of pests arranged next to pennies for scale, highlight the helplessness of the insects, yet the intimations of familiar insecurities make us wonder if we are equally pathetic.

Saydam's eclectic works are cryptic and dissonant, constantly playing with the allusive qualities of text and image, and tapping into ingrained fears in humorous ways. They provide no answers, only an invitation to stare, strangely fascinated, and possibly recoil.

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