

**LIST PROJECTS 32: ELIF SAYDAM AT THE
MIT LIST VISUAL ARTS CENTER.**



The MIT List Visual Arts Center has opened *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.



FAD Magazine, July 2025

Tanya Leighton

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, we are thrilled to be bringing their work to audiences in Boston and beyond in their first U.S. solo show."

says Zach Ngin, Curatorial Assistant.



Tanya Leighton

For **List Projects 32**, Saydam presents 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 Zach Ngjn, Curatorial Assistant, with Natalie Bell, Curator.

LIST PROJECTS 32: ELIF SAYDAM – August 31st,
2025 Bakalar Gallery, at The List Visual Arts Center

All images: Install MIT List, List Projects 32, Elif Saydam Photo Julia Featheringill

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