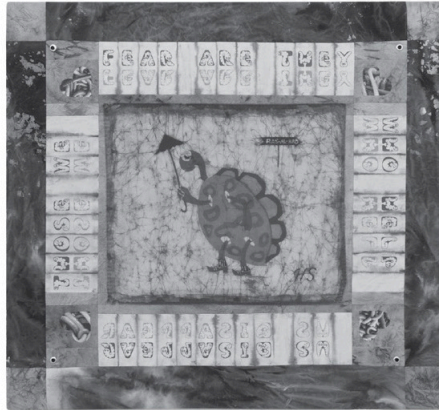


FLASH ART

3 Elif Saydam, *Mutter Natur*, 2019. Inkjet transfer, aluminium grommets on hand-stitched dyed canvas, featuring a Batik print c. 1988 by the artist's mother, Hüla Saydam, mounted on poplar board. Photography by Laura Findlay. Courtesy of the artist and Franz Kaka, Toronto.



3 ELIF SAYDAM
"La belle dame sans merci"

Franz Kaka, Toronto
by Steffanie Ling

The works in "La belle dame sans merci" consider the power dynamic of host and parasite. *I, pathogen* (2019) establishes the personhood of the parasite. Six frames from Disney's *The Winged Scourge* (1943) – an animated short that illustrates how malaria is transmitted – are layered on jewel-toned, tie-dyed canvas. The film vilifies the mosquito as a harbinger of sickness and poverty, and depicts the Seven Dwarfs as a team of eager volunteer exterminators who are shown draining a wetland and liberally fumigating their cottage.

This public-health educational film is not really about preventing malaria, but seems to be more about placating anxiety around labor efficiency (contracting malaria is economically irresponsible) and being able to exert control over the natural environment. It's a highly effective foil for what the rest of Saydam's works offer: vaguely erotic counternarratives.

Saccharina (Flesh and Sugar) (2019) incorporates a beaded fringe, dashes of sugar icing on canvas, and a text set along its edges: "WAVES OF ECSTASY ACROSS MY SPINELESS BODY AS SHE PINCHED ME IN HER FINGERS." Reading it calls on the viewer to account for the desires, pains, and pleasures of the parasite coalescing in the process of its own annihilation. Morbid yet hot.

The exhibition's title piece (2019) is an installation of laminated inkjet prints forming a grid of images held together by steel rings. Each image is of advertising and retail signage that depicts pests as deranged but cute cartoons. How have we employed animation to palliate fearful encounters with pests? How has such a mode of representation constructed dominance and justified destruction? It draws an extremely thick line in the sand.

Individual letters embedded in the installation form this line from Keats's ballad "La Belle Dame sans Merci" (1819): "The sedge is withered from the lake and no bird sings." The invocation of a Romantic poet complements the winking notion of not only a truce but a tryst between inherent contradictions: parasite and host, pleasure and pain. Throughout the exhibition, Saydam craftily channels one of Keats's key romantic ideas: negative capability. "That is when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason" – thus allowing for a consideration of radical compatibility.

Flash Art, April–May 2019