



Who's Your Dadi?
Meera Sethi

This catalogue is published on the occasion of Meera Sethi's solo exhibition, *Who's Your Dadi?*, on view from August 27-October 29, 2022 in Hamilton Artists Inc.'s Cannon Gallery.

Meera Sethi is a contemporary Canadian visual artist with an interdisciplinary, intuitive, and research-based practice that moves between painting, drawing, fibre, photography, illustration, performance, and social practice. Her work lays at the intersection of the subjugated body and histories of cloth with a particular focus on South Asia and its diasporas. She is interested in the making, wearing, and disposing of cloth; the uses of clothing as a form of self-expression and resistance; and the ways textile is constituted over vast geographies formed through empire, racial capitalism, caste, heteropatriarchy, and settler colonialism. Through her work, she delves deep into the ways we understand and appreciate cloth, clothing, and the body, including its histories, its resonances, and its possibilities.

Laila Malik is a desisporic writer in Adobigok, traditional land of the Wendat, the Seneca, and the Mississaugas of the Credit River. Her work has appeared in a variety of Canadian and international literary journals, and her debut poetry collection, *archipelago*, is forthcoming with book*hug press, spring 2023.

The Dadi Principle

Laila Malik

Seemingly benign, Dadi is quicksilver.

At Meera Sethi's exhibition *Who's Your Dadi* (2022), we are invited in, gently immersed, and the boundaries between the real and the imaginary, the remembered, forgotten, and might-have-been are momentarily uncertain.

But this is not your mother's Dadi.

Or maybe it is.

The Dadi is not just a grandmother. She is your father's mother. In some patriarchies, this position holds particular meanings. It can mean that she has passed through various pre-set trials and arrived at the pinnacle of feminine achievement, which is to say, the mother of a son who has betrothed and begat. It often means she has finally earned the right to reign within her prescribed channels—as opposed to the other grandmother, the Nani, who must make peace—or war—with the so-called reproductive failure of bearing daughters, in whatever ways she can. Significantly, it can mean that the Dadi supersedes even the patriarch.

She can be the source of great affection, showering her heirs with rewards for coming to fruition. She can be the source of dread, punishing and policing them for interloping maternal genes. She can be the source of justice, keeping errant sons in check and ensuring they never do to their wives what may have been done to her or to others like her.



Sethi's Dadi may embody some of these experiences. Viewers may catch glimpses of their own paternal grandmothers in the attire, expressions and postures of Sethi's subjects—all of whom are entirely imagined by the artist.

But Sethi's Dadi is also a coven. There is a powerful, quiet multiplicity, transcending class, sub-ethnicity and geography. They might not exactly be friends with one another, one a dream in pastels, poised on intricately carved wood, under an embroidered frieze, adorned in a delicate, eyeleted white cardigan, another cross-legged on the floor and staring directly at the viewer, her red and black mackinaw



and hand-knitted orange balaclava seamless over a printed shalwar gameez, her bare feet unapologetic, the corner of a bicycle visible through the open door to the laundry line in the gully behind her. Every detail in Sethi's textile and setting choices holds specific meaning and sends a unique message—while broadly culturally connected, each of these Dadis inhabits a wildly different world from the next.

Yet, they are nonetheless silently at work together from their respective perches, with pens and blank sheets of paper at the ready in each of their frames. These



are weapons and warnings. They should instill excitement—and for some, maybe fear—because Sethi has convened a lost council of elders who are watching and taking note, connected by this material technology, always within arm’s reach. Across class and land and ocean, they exist as a collective refusal to be written out of the narrative. With her characteristically subtle hand, Sethi has invoked a Dadi Principle.

This imaginal work is precious. The clamour of assertions about who we were and who we must become is cacophonous and filled with forces who would usurp and redirect these ideas to their own ends. Sethi’s question, *who’s your Dadi?*, is tongue-in-cheek and rhetorical as much as it is urgent and essential. Sethi is asking us, who will we choose, and what will we take forward? They are watching, the Dadis, counseling us to choose wisely, choose justly, choose lovingly.

Our futures hang in the balance.

Writing: Laila Malik
Copy Editing: Sally McKay
Documentation: Abedar Kamgari
Design: Eli Nolet
ISBN 978-1-926454-21-4



HAMILTON ARTISTS INC.

155 James St N
Hamilton, Ontario
L8R 2K9
<http://theinc.ca>

Hamilton Artists Inc. would like to acknowledge the generous support of its funders, donors, sponsors, and programming partners.



Canada Council
for the Arts

Conseil des arts
du Canada



ONTARIO ARTS COUNCIL
CONSEIL DES ARTS DE L'ONTARIO
an Ontario government agency
un organisme du gouvernement de l'Ontario



Cover: Meera Sethi, *Who's Your Dadi?*, Installation view at Hamilton Artists Inc. *Sushma*, 2022. Acrylic on canvas.

Page 3: Meera Sethi, *Who's Your Dadi?*, Installation view at Hamilton Artists Inc. From left to right: *Sushma*, 2022. Acrylic on canvas. *Who's Your Dadi?*, 2022. Painting on gallery floor. *Who's Your Dadi?*, 2022. Found object installation. *Shakuntalabai*, 2022. Acrylic on Canvas.

Page 4: Meera Sethi, *Who's Your Dadi?*, Installation view at Hamilton Artists Inc. From left to right: *Shanta Ba*, 2022. Acrylic on canvas. *Kaushalya*, 2022. Acrylic on canvas.

Page 5: Meera Sethi, *Who's Your Dadi?*, Installation view at Hamilton Artists Inc. Painting on gallery floor (detail view).

