

Faisa Omer: *Threading Roots*

Curated by Reyhab Mohmed Patel

Threading Roots presents the work of Somali Canadian photographer Faisa Omer, who was born in Ottawa and works at Carleton University. Drawing on skills developed through her work as a psychotherapist, Omer approaches her artistic practice through listening and reflection, collaborating with family and community members. Interwoven throughout *Threading Roots* is the relationship between archival memory and contemporary representation. Through family photographs and objects, traditional and contemporary textiles, stories and studio portraiture, the exhibition considers how connections to Somalia are inherited and reimagined within the diaspora.

A textile work created by Omer's sister uses Somali colours and acts as the exhibition's connective thread. It is paired with the striking portrait *Boqoraad*, which conveys cultural affirmation, power and presence. *Boqoraad* means "Queen" in Somali, and the sitter's clothes (*dirac*) and adornment celebrate Somali identity while introducing the exhibition's broader exploration of textiles and cultural inheritance. Together, the works invite us to follow the threads of family, memory and material culture.

The journey continues into the next space, *Homes*, which transports us into a Somali Canadian living room. The main wall overflows with photographs and personal objects treasured and ferried from Hargeisa to Ottawa by Khadra Sufi, Omer's mother, and spanning from the 1980s to the 2020s. Other recognizable staples from Somali Canadian homes – curtains, traditional textiles, *Aqal* (traditional hut) woven building materials and seating – create the feeling of home that Sufi has built in every place she has lived. You can hear her speak to the memories collected alongside the objects in a poem written and recited in Somali.

The final two spaces, *Speak* and *Exist*, present a collection of Omer's "photovoice" projects from 2020-2023, where photography is used as a means of communicating experiences that can be difficult to put into words. In *Speak*, the transition from darker tones and expressions to brighter colours reflects the shifting experiences of mental health, while drawing on Omer's counselling practice and commitment to self-representation. In *Exist*, Omer uses textiles to extend fashion portraits beyond the frame. Her photographs reimagine inherited visual languages, as heritage becomes something that can be carried forward, worn and transformed.

Across the photographs, fabrics, voices and archival materials, threading operates as both material and metaphor, connecting Hargeisa and Canada, family members' archives and contemporary images, memory and imagination. *Threading Roots* ultimately presents heritage as a living inheritance, continually shaping the present and what is carried into the future.

- Reyhab Mohmed Patel

Special thanks to Khadra Sufi, Zaynab Omer, Sahra Omer, Basra Sufi, Anisa Sufi and Filsan Sabri.

Translation to Somali by Saadia Goodir

Faiza Omer is a portrait photographer as well as the Counsellor for Racialized Students in Residence at Carleton University. Her educational background includes a bachelor's and a master's in neuroscience from Carleton University as well as a second master's in counselling psychology from Yorkville University. Faiza also learned the technical aspects of studio photography at Algonquin College. Her work has been shown at the Ottawa Art Gallery, the Art Gallery of Alberta, the Soomaal House of Art and is owned by two Canadian mayors.

Reyhab Mohmed Patel is a PhD candidate in sociology at Carleton University, scholar-artist and curator whose work investigates Muslim creative practices, cultural memory, identity and belonging. Through her curatorial and artistic practice, Patel explores how photography, fashion, textiles, and material culture can preserve, reinterpret, and reimagine diasporic histories.