



Jagdeep Raina

Intimate Strangers

September 24 - November 8, 2025

Opening reception: Wednesday September 24, 5-8pm

COOPER COLE is pleased to announce *Intimate Strangers*, the third solo exhibition by Jagdeep Raina at the gallery.

What does it mean to explore a kind of living, breathing, tangible historical memory that is still unfolding right in front of us over real-time?

Intimate Strangers is a body of work that includes poetry, embroidered textiles, ceramics, and works on paper. It draws from oral histories and conversations that document the lives of international students from South Asia, a community at the heart of Canada's exploitative gig economy.

For Raina, these scenes were generated through time he spent with Laadliyan, a non-profit group in Brampton, Ontario, with a mission of empowering South-Asian residents and newcomers through education, engagement, and awareness. Raina began to hear about the various challenges that were impacting these individuals: economic exploitation, inflated tuition fees, precarious housing conditions, isolation, loneliness, neglect. These stories have inspired the creation of this exhibit.

"The exploitation of labour depends on the differences marked by race and ethnicity within the different sections of the labour force."

- Stuart Hall

A series of drawings depicts Southern Ontario's urban landscapes. Snow-covered factories, suburban rows of homes, parking lots, and bus terminals lay the groundwork for the exhibit. Inspired by Edward Hopper's city scenes, and Toba Khedoori's architectural drawings, these images feel at once ordinary, yet distant and familiar.

These drawings are paired with a series of Raina's intricate embroideries. These fabric works offer a candid and melancholic look at everyday life; stitched scenes that reflect on intimate moments of precarity, danger, growth, love, and joy. The materiality and processes of making introduce an additional layer to the representation of invisible labour within these scenes, with each work incorporating poetry that further articulates and contextualizes the lived experiences depicted.



This exhibition also presents the artist's first set of ceramics. These objects become a site where beauty and fracture coexist, embodying the precarious conditions faced by the people whose stories animate the exhibition. By extending his practice into ceramics, Raina situates these narratives within an ancient medium of labour and craft, highlighting the ways in which materiality itself can hold the weight of vulnerability, resilience, and survival.

In this exhibition, Raina's compositions draw influence from a wide range of references, including the intricate figuration of Indian miniature painting, the surrealist interiors of René Magritte, the stark charcoal drawings of Kara Walker and Mike Kelley, the delicate watercolour studies of Canadian artist J. Fenwick Lansdowne, and the evocative poetics of Yusuf Komunyakaa and Sylvia Plath.

Intimate Strangers aims to intervene in a history that is both raw and unfinished, unfolding with unprecedented velocity amid global conditions of displacement and migration. The experiences they register reveal how the movements of people, labour, and culture produce histories whose social, political, and psychic consequences far exceed our current capacity to fully apprehend or narrate.

In the spirit of family, community, and collaboration, *Intimate Strangers* will feature a continuous screening of *New Canadian (S02 E06)* from the award-winning Crave Original series *Late Bloomer*, written and directed by Jasmeet Raina. The following creative text written by Manvir Bhangu also accompanies the exhibition, offering an additional lens through which to consider the themes of the exhibit.



Dear Laadli,

Did you know this was how it was going to be? When you first dreamt of coming to Canada to start this new chapter in your life, did you ever imagine it would feel like this? Did you think the path would hold more thorns than roses? That instead of finding helping hands at every turn, you would often be met with people ready to take advantage of you?

When your mom calls, her first question is always, “Have you eaten?” And every time, you smile through the phone and say yes, even though your heart longs for her warm daal and soft roti. She asks how you’re doing, and again you reply with “I’m fine. Everything is fine.” But inside, you ache. Because how do you tell her the truth? How do you tell her that you haven’t eaten properly in days, or that you haven’t had a peaceful night’s sleep since you left home?

Did you ever imagine it would turn out this way, Laadli? That the girl who was so loved, so sheltered from the harshness of the world, would one day journey alone to the other side of it? Did you think stepping into a new country would feel this difficult, this isolating? Did you ever think that in a city so alive with people and culture, you could still feel invisible? Did you ever think even your own community might turn its back, or worse, take advantage of you?

They painted you a picture of a beautiful and successful journey—promises of education, safety, and opportunity. They told you stories of personal and professional growth, of abundance, of a bright future. But they never spoke of the other side: the exploitation and abuse, the unaffordability, the scams waiting to prey on you. They didn’t mention the weight of high tuition fees, the endless worry about visas and work permits, the impossible pressure to excel academically while working long hours just to make ends meet. They didn’t warn you about the exhaustion, the stress, or the way it would all rest so heavily on your young shoulders.

But Laadli, I see you. I see the courage it took to leave behind everything familiar—your family, your friends, the comfort of home—and to step into this new world with nothing but hope and determination. I see the struggles you carry quietly, the sacrifices you make that no one else notices. I see how you fight to succeed, how you push yourself to make your family proud, how you hold yourself together even when you feel like breaking inside.

I know there are days when the loneliness feels unbearable, when all you want is the sound of your siblings’ laughter, the comfort of your mother’s cooking, the embrace of home. I know there are nights when you lie awake wondering if it’s worth it, when the silence of your room feels louder than your own heartbeat.

And yet, every day, you rise. You wake up, put one foot in front of the other, and keep moving forward. That resilience is no small thing, Laadli. It is proof of your strength, of your commitment to your dreams, of the power within you to withstand storms and still keep going.

You are not alone in this journey. Even when it feels like the world has turned its back, know that there are those who see you, who believe in you, and who walk beside you in spirit. You are stronger than you realize, braver than you know, and more loved than you can imagine.

You’ve got this, Laadli. And you’ve got me.

With love,
Laadli



Jagdeep Raina (b. 1991, Guelph, Ontario, Canada) has an interdisciplinary practice that spans textile, drawing, writing, ceramics, 35mm film, and video animation. Jagdeep Raina utilizes the archive in order to explore historical memory. His multi-media practice seeks to identify the residue left behind by the human touch, and its restorative potential.

Raina is a previous Fellow of the Core Program, Museum of Fine Arts Houston, as well as a Paul Mellon Fellow at Yale University. He was a recipient of the 2020 Sobey Art Award, and a resident at the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture. He received his BFA from Western University in 2013, and his MFA from the Rhode Island School of Design in 2016. Raina was included in the 2025 Istanbul Biennial and he has exhibited internationally at Galerie Anne Barrault, Paris; Todd Madigan Art Gallery at California State University, Bakersfield; Libby Leshgold Gallery, Emily Carr University, Vancouver; Blaffer Art Museum, Houston; Jhaveri Contemporary, Mumbai; Cooper Cole; Humber Galleries; Museum of Contemporary Art; Textile Museum, Toronto; Soft Opening, London; Midway Contemporary, Minneapolis; Art Gallery of Guelph, Guelph; Art Gallery of Alberta, Edmonton; Rubin Museum of Art, New York; RISD Museum of Art, Providence; Humber Galleries, Toronto; Provincetown Art Association and Museum, Provincetown; Camden Arts Centre, London; and Modern Fuel Artist Run Centre, Kingston, amongst others.

His works can be found in the permanent collections of Musée des Beaux-Arts de Montréal, Rhode Island School of Design Museum, Yale Center for British Art, Carleton University Art Gallery, Art Gallery of Guelph, National Gallery of Canada, and the Speed Art Museum. Raina lives and works in Queens, New York, USA.