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## Rojia Dadashzadeh

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[See table of contents](#)

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ARTIST TEACHER  
**Rojia Dadashzadeh**



*Rojia Dadashzadeh is an Iranian/Canadian artist with a studio-based practice in Vancouver. Dadashzadeh works across a range of media in sculpture, painting, drawing. Dadashzadeh's work has been published in various media outlets such as Preview, The Vancouver Sun, Georgia Straight, and The City Without Art? Her work has been exhibited nationally and internationally in Toronto, Portland, Los Angeles, and Vancouver. Dadashzadeh teaches grades 7-12 within IB Visual Arts and Culinary Arts programs at Brockton School in North Vancouver. She is a member of the IB Educator Network and is an IB Workshop Leader, holding a Bachelor of Fine Arts (Honours) from the University of Waterloo, a postgraduate degree in New Media Design from Sheridan College, Le Grand Diplôme in Cuisine and Pastry from Le Cordon Bleu, Paris, a Bachelor of Education and a Master of Arts in Art Education from the University of British Columbia. Her teaching and artistic practice are closely intertwined in ways that one informs the other.*

"Say goodbye to your art practice!", a Vancouver-based secondary art teacher once told me, years ago during my volunteer work in their classroom as part of my teacher's training application. People often ask me how I manage to balance teaching art and maintaining my own art practice. In my perspective, the concept of compartmentalizing work and life has remained irrelevant. I aspire to live a life that serves as an inspiration to both myself and others. Recently, I found myself navigating a balancing act that encompassed my thesis, a full-time job, my art practice, and family responsibilities. While certainly not without its difficulties, I approached this challenge with a deep commitment, anchored by a supportive network, and above all, an enduring passion. In my view, passion represents a strong and vital force that compels one to engage with aspects of life that promote personal and collective growth and transformation. Considering the origin of the word "passion" from the Latin "pati," meaning "to suffer," it's reasonable to think that life experiences play a role in shaping one's passion to pursue something personally meaningful. My upbringing in Iran lacked art education during my crucial years, despite my love for creating art. Additionally, my curiosity as a child often went unattended by my teachers, perhaps not intentionally, but perhaps they didn't know how to nurture it. These experiences have greatly contributed to my passion for both art and teaching and their potential for transformation.

I recently took a month-long pause from teaching to focus on my thesis. I was able to complete my writing within the initial ten days, allocating the remaining time to frequent my studio on a daily basis. A week into this daily

routine, I began to realize and once again appreciate the interrelated relationship that binds my teaching and art practice. When I think back, this realization was the guiding force to become a teacher. It was the simple joy of sharing and teaching art through workshops at the studio that made me realize my aspiration for teaching. Before stepping into the role of an art educator, my path took various turns. I worked as an in-house designer for sports, music, and art festivals, and animation companies. I also explored the culinary arts, training at Le Cordon Bleu Paris as a chef de cuisine and pastry. Moreover, an unexpected yet valuable detour for personal growth led me to the world of clowning, where I trained at a clowning school based on Richard Pochincos' clownology methods and teachings.

In a way, these diverse experiences weren't detours at all; they were the cornerstones that paved my way to becoming the teacher and artist I am today. Art and teaching are continuously woven into my everyday life. There is a symbiotic and reciprocal interplay between my art and teaching practice; often existing in an exploratory realm where they enrich and extend each other, challenging my personal and professional growth.

In my art practice, I engage with the materiality of things. I work across a range of media in sculpture, painting, drawing, installation, and collage. My practice draws upon multiple approaches from miniature to life-size, allowing micro and macro visions to inform and inspire each other. Miniature pieces are a blueprint for the larger works, while those on a larger scale contain the intricacies found in the smaller pieces. I work through a reductive-like process



The entrance to my studio at 1000 Parker Street in East Vancouver



Inside my studio in East Vancouver



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Inside my studio in East Vancouver

in which I construct multiple small and abstracted parts, made playfully with a diverse range of materials, and surfaces. They are then assembled or composed together to form elaborate and more complex compositions and structures that elicit delight while revealing a story about both the singular form and the whole.

I also adopt this reductive-like process in my teaching practice while keeping in mind my diverse learners. I aim to scaffold and simplify complex aesthetic and conceptual outcomes into accessible and exploratory components that encourage critical-thinking and engagement. As an educator, I begin by thinking with concepts and I tend to weave the world's current events into my curriculum. Guided by my own perspectives and experiences as an Iranian/Canadian scholar/artist/teacher and as a woman, my pedagogical approach often is influenced by politics and I employ art as a medium to explore diverse and intricate notions of diversity, inclusivity, equity, and justice within my curriculum across various contexts. I invite my students to critically engage with these ideas, to notice power relations, and to unsettle this power relation in their thinking, and their art practice. By intertwining my artistic approach with my teaching philosophy, I intend to cultivate a potential space where my students can engage in meaningful exploration of the pressing issues of our time, in hopes of fostering empathy and understanding while nurturing their own artistic and intellectual growth.

I would like to share a unit, *Roots on a Plate: Family Recipe and Heritage*, I have written and taught to grade eight art students, demonstrating how it aligns with the ideas I've discussed.

Culinary Connections: Exploring Family Recipes, Identity, and Family History is an inquiry-based unit centered on family heritage and identity with the intent to create a nurturing and culturally enriching educational experience for our young learners, fostering empathy, understanding, and respect among students while celebrating cultural diversity within an inclusive classroom environment where students can delve into their family heritage, embrace differences, and express themselves creatively.

Throughout this unit, students embark on a journey to explore their diverse cultural

backgrounds through cherished family recipes. I combine art-making processes, visible-thinking strategies, and interactive lessons to create a fun and inclusive learning experience for my students. I have scaffolded the unit into five key processes:

**Identify Significant Family Recipes:** Students select family recipes of special cultural value and traditions as focal points for exploration.

**Research Family Heritage:** With the use of comprehensive worksheets, students are guided in researching their cultural roots through interviews with relatives and friends, fostering a broader perspective on family heritage and stories that shape their history. I scaffold the research component into two areas: Macro and Micro research. Using a step-by-step worksheet with guiding questions, I encourage my students to collect data from diverse sources, ensuring a comprehensive representation of their family history, identity, and heritage. This approach tends to equip students to critically engage with historical narratives, acknowledging that some histories have been documented from a one-sided perspective.

**Sketch Artistic Plated Recipes:** Students then envision their family recipes on plates, exploring unique visual elements in their culinary heritage. By doing classroom art demonstrations, I find I am able to equip my students with artistic skills to help them visualize and document their ideas for their art projects.

**Sculpt Cultural Representations:** By utilizing mediums like felt, florist foam, clay, and found objects, students craft visually expressive representations of their family recipes. I adopt the notion of Macro and Micro and introduce slow and attentive observation in research in encouraging students to pay close attention to details that they see in each food, reminding them that at times our minds tend to generalize significant details about things

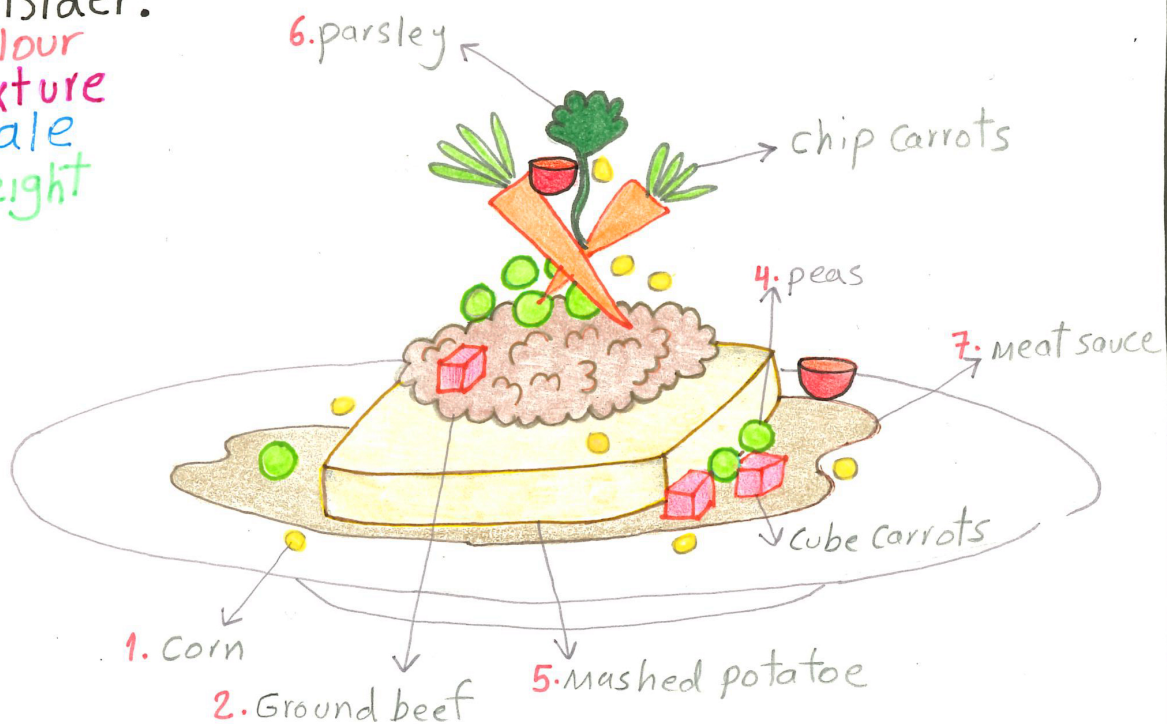
**Write/Record Excerpts:** Tools and prompts empower students to create contextualized narratives, sharing the historical and cultural significance of their family recipes.

INGREDIENT	NAME: Shepard's pie	MATERIAL+PROCESS
<sup>colour/size/amount</sup> 1. Corn/yellow/small (3) 2. Beef/brown/medium-Large (1) 3. Carrot/orange/medium (2) 4. peas/green/small (7) 5. potatoe/yellow/Large (1) 6. parsley/green/(1) 7. Meat sauce/Red brown/Large (1) 8. 9.		1. loose felt + Needle felting 2. florist foam + Carving 3. sculpey + sculpting 4. Felt sheet + hand stitching 5. found objects + finding 6. 7. 8. 9.

## PROFILE VIEW OF PLATE COMPOSITION

consider:

Colour  
 Texture  
 scale  
 Height











Collection of students completed 'Plated Recipe' sculptures.





In collaboration with Allison Hardy, *The Garden* exhibition at Pendulum Gallery Vancouver in 2017, inspired by the small three dimensional paper collage.