Portraits of Sai Baba of Shirdi (late 1830s–1918) are everywhere to be seen in public space in Mumbai. Are these images sacred? According to the saint himself, historical exponents of his teachings, and many ordinary Mumbai residents, the answer is “Yes.” What does it mean to encounter divine power in a mass-reproduced image? Drawing on material from his just-released book, The Neighborhood of Gods: The Sacred and the Visible at the Margins of Mumbai (University of Chicago Press, December 2018), William Elison’s talk will trace rival logics in the cult of the saintly icon across three historical junctures.

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