Today's Masterpiece: Pouran Jinchi, _Untitled 13 (Rubaiyat series)_, 1996. Ink and acrylic on canvas; 30 x 19 15/16 in. (762 x 506.41 mm). Museum purchase with funds provided by Sarah E. Aghassi, Nasrin Owsia & Behrooz Akbarnia, Gita Khadiri & Fred Khoroushi, Farnaz & Kourosh Mehrayin, Eugene "Mitch" Mitchell, and Mahsa Vahidi & Arman Paymai in honor of Ms. Shahri Estakhry, 2022.31.

Welcome back to **Masterpiece Minute at Virtual SDMA**. This is your host, **Ladan Akbarnia**, Curator of South Asian and Islamic Art at The San Diego Museum of Art. Drop in every month to hear a new mini talk led by SDMA curators or guests featuring works from the Museum's collection.

Today's episode introduces an exciting new acquisition to the Museum's holdings of arts from Iran. It is a calligraphic painting by Iranian-American artist Pouran Jinchi, executed in ink and acrylic on canvas and reflecting a brilliant interplay between word and image that defines much of Jinchi's artistic practice. The language referenced is Persian, but most words have been broken down into single letters, the most visible among them being the letter *nun* ("noon"), or "n," which consists of a circular "c" shape with a rhomboid dot at its center. These are rendered in a cobalt blue or rust orange-red, shaded so that they appear to emerge from a heap of darker, flatter *nun*s, *sin*s ("s's"), and other letters below them. Underneath, the reader of Persian or even Arabic—as the Arabic alphabet is used to write modern Persian—will recognize complete if illegible words occupying an underlying tier of layered paint—that's what you see etched into the coated canvas. Jinchi's script of choice is the cursive *nasta'liq*, developed in Iran in the fourteenth century and deemed the finest of all Persian calligraphic scripts. The *nasta'liq* letters become reduced here to individual units, falling upon one another in layers that somehow create a harmonious chaos of positive and negative space.

Jinchi often works in series, many of them inspired by the poetry and prose of Iran's literary masters. This piece belongs to a series inspired by the Persian poet and polymath, Omar Khayyam (1014–1131). Some of you may be familiar with Khayyam, whose signature poetry in the form of quatrains, known in Persian as *rubaiyat*, was translated into English by Edward FitzGerald in the 19th century. Born in Nishapur in northeastern Iran, the poet was also an accomplished mathematician, astronomer, historian, and philosopher. In this and other paintings from Jinchi's series, words from Khayyam's *Rubaiyat* become deconstructed, with their letters broken down, reduced, and re-presented in a dynamic, abstract composition. Color plays as great a role as the animated calligraphic units forming triangular bodies that meet in the center, lending depth and variation to complement the texturing of text scribbled into the layered yellowish-taupe base. Color is so important to the artist, she creates a brand-new palette for each of her series.

The *Rubaiyat* series represents Jinchi's early career, during which the artist explored word and image more literally using celebrated Persian poetic texts by Khayyam and Hafez (1048–1131), another classical poet, as a foundation. The artist's numerous series have been said to function like chapters in a larger book, each containing its own formal and technical characteristics, but all speaking to larger issues, such as how

art and language function as modes of communication, or how art can convey the intangible essence of experience. Her more recent works explore the relationship between artist and society, and the artist's role in times of social upheaval and political turmoil. Throughout, Jinchi's artistic practice explores intersections of literary and pictorial narratives through a meticulous craftsmanship and a holistic, even meditative approach. In her own words, "I use text, words, letters, literature and poetry in my art… the challenge is always this—how to get the viewer to experience the written words through a visual sensory… I try to communicate between the space where words are seen and visuals are experienced. It's a kind of storytelling."

Jinchi's background as a mathematician, her training in Persian calligraphy, and her exposure to and interest in abstract expressionism in the US, all factor significantly in her practice. Born and raised in Mashhad, home to one of the most sacred pilgrimage sites in Shi'a Islam, Jinchi was exposed to the powerful role of writing and calligraphy on architectural surfaces as well as on objects and paper in both Persian and Islamic culture throughout her life in Iran, where she also trained as a traditional calligrapher. The artist then moved to the US, where she was educated in both the analytical and creative fields, earning a Bachelor of Science degree in Civil Engineering from George Washington University and studying art at UCLA and at the Art Students League of New York. Recently, after living and working in New York City for most of her career, Jinchi relocated to Porto, Portugal, where she continues across different media to explore color, form, and the relationships between text and image.

Thank you for listening! This has been **Ladan** on **Masterpiece Minute at Virtual SDMA**!

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