

nika khanjani

broken hands and feet

a transmission of rumi's ghazal 2131

across generations, countries,

time zones, and centuries

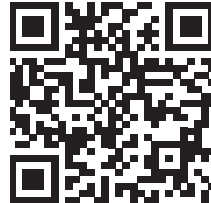
**RUMI ROAMING: CONTEMPORARY
ENGAGEMENTS AND INTERVENTIONS
CURATED AND EDITED BY GITA HASH-
EMI**

Book Citation:

Hashemi, Gita, ed. *rumi roaming:
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ventions*. (Toronto: Guernica World
Editions and SubversivePress, 2025).

This article: pp 144-147.

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<http://hdl.handle.net/10315/41082>

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nika khanjani | 2022



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کوشش و عارض
نکته بن با عاشقان
سینه را چون
عشق را پیمانه
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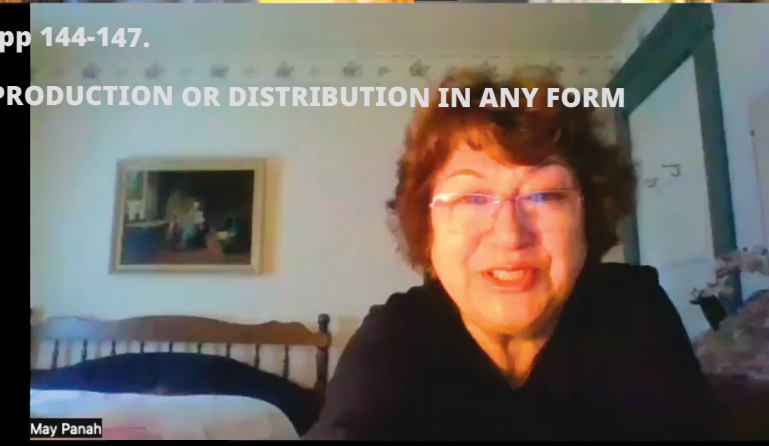


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May Panah

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What follows are the traces of a process. The title is a rough translation of a Persian expression about speaking a language badly, *dast-o pāshekaste*.

In creating a new work under some difficult circumstances, I had several email exchanges with curator and editor Gita Hashemi. I include my emails, mostly intact and unedited, to give background and context to the video that I made in collaboration with my mother and daughter.

This is an honest peek into the process, in working with constraints of the pandemic, burnout, and imperfect technology as well as more subterranean themes of exile, the trauma of losing one's ancestral homeland and language, and the earnest attempts to transmit old mystical lyrical poetry into days that are clogged with bad news, bad internet connections, climate anxiety and unresolved family dynamics. We are simply doing the best we can.

I used this imperfect work around faulty transmissions as an opportunity to push back against perfectionism and pull myself closer towards acceptance. I may never speak Persian as well as I would like. I may not have taught my daughter as much Persian as I would have liked; but against many odds, I am still holding onto these beautiful threads that keep me tethered to a distant home, one that I carry within me as I live as a guest on other occupied lands.

DECEMBER 11, 2021

I'm considering co-creating an audio piece (maybe some visual) with my mother. She'll be visiting soon and I feel confident we can carve out space to record her teaching me how to recite one of the poems. Me, with my diasporic accent; her, with her own broken Persian after so many years of surviving in North America. I imagine asking her a few questions or offering word prompts for us to explore. I imagine the tone to be warm, measured, vulnerable, with one voice reading a phrase of the poem, the other voice trying to repeat it. I would include a written piece to accompany it.

I think so much about how the disorientation from displacement and trauma limits our capacity to be more curious

about the lands on which we've arrived and settled. About the cultures and people who had relationships with this land. It feels like a double-grief of displacement and exile: loss of one's ancestral connections, and difficult access to the ancestors of our new home. Something I've been feeling out.

JANUARY 25, 2022

Checking in briefly to give you an update. My mother couldn't visit us in the end for all the pandemic reasons/travel restrictions/etc.

We recorded our project through Zoom and ... it's interesting. I'm not sure how it will read to viewers but I'm in the process of editing and working with the material—recitation of the first part of one of the poems by each of us, phrase by phrase—and I'll see what kind of shape I can get it into by February 1.

FEBRUARY 04, 2022

Thanks for the note. So, yes, we incorporated video and leaned into zoom — with its glitchy sound and frozen video. I'm working on a rough edit and I can send something along to you shortly for feedback. I think there's something real in there. I just have to sculpt and finesse a bit to find the rhythm of it. I'd like it to be no more than 5 minutes, or somewhere around there.

FEBRUARY 07, 2022

Here's the draft of this video collaboration I did with my mother and daughter through zoom. I left a lot out (the frustrating tech bloopers, which are somewhat hilarious but also mostly embarrassing) but I'm still thinking of putting some other shots in, and taking others out.

APRIL 20, 2022

My apologies for the radio silence. I appreciate you

reaching out, yet again, to check in with the project. The video is edited and much tighter, but that's all I could muster in the past couple of months. We've simply been managing a series of family challenges and financial/time scarcity and, what I thought would be a fairly simple, enjoyable writing exercise has been hard for my overwhelmed brain to articulate. I realized the deadline came and went amidst a death in the family that had us traveling back to the US last minute and I didn't have it in me even to let you know.

I'm in production this week for a film I'm shooting on Sunday. I know I can't do anything until then. I just wanted to write back before another day passed.

I've been trying to connect some simple dots around the resonance I feel with the discourse of language transmission and renewal that Indigenous peoples on Turtle Island have been fighting for. It inspires me and also touches on some shame that I didn't learn Persian well enough to read, to write, to speak and to understand Rumi.

There are entanglements that, when I start following the threads, touch up against vulnerability I'm not quite ready to throw into the world publically. My parents didn't actively teach me Persian (they were in survival mode) and yet were embarrassed by the way I spoke it poorly. I made efforts to learn and

yet, at some point, I got tired of walking around with a posture of apology with Iranians because I didn't properly speak our mother tongue.

I've been trying to accept myself as Iranian enough even if my efforts aren't measuring up to some standards. But then as I learn from the Algonquin community of Barrier Lake, and Lakota language programs on Standing Rock, and the importance they give to reclaiming their own languages in order to heal and reconnect to the land and themselves, I find my shame bubbling up—that I speak to my child in English and send her to a French public school rather than prioritize teaching her one of her ancestral languages. This shame, though, is bound up with trauma—and writing about it takes a delicacy of mind and pen that I just haven't been able to access. There's grief when I see the extent to which colonization has disconnected me from my own language, how imperialism has wrecked my parents and countless others and how capitalism threw them into perpetual survival mode.

I DO want to disentangle the threads and I DO want to learn publicly, but it feels like the stress of the past two years has quite literally made me dumber. I don't want to send you something sloppy, and I don't have the brainpower or agility to think clearly about this—so I've been stuck.

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Nika Khanjani is an Isfahan-born, Houston-raised, NYC-schooled filmmaker, writer and somatic-based trauma healer residing as a guest on the unceded lands of the Kanien'kéha Nation, known as Tiohtià:ke or Montreal. She is the librettist for the opera *Vanishing Point*, adapted as her most recent film.