

BALANCING ACT

poem by Ajay Kumar

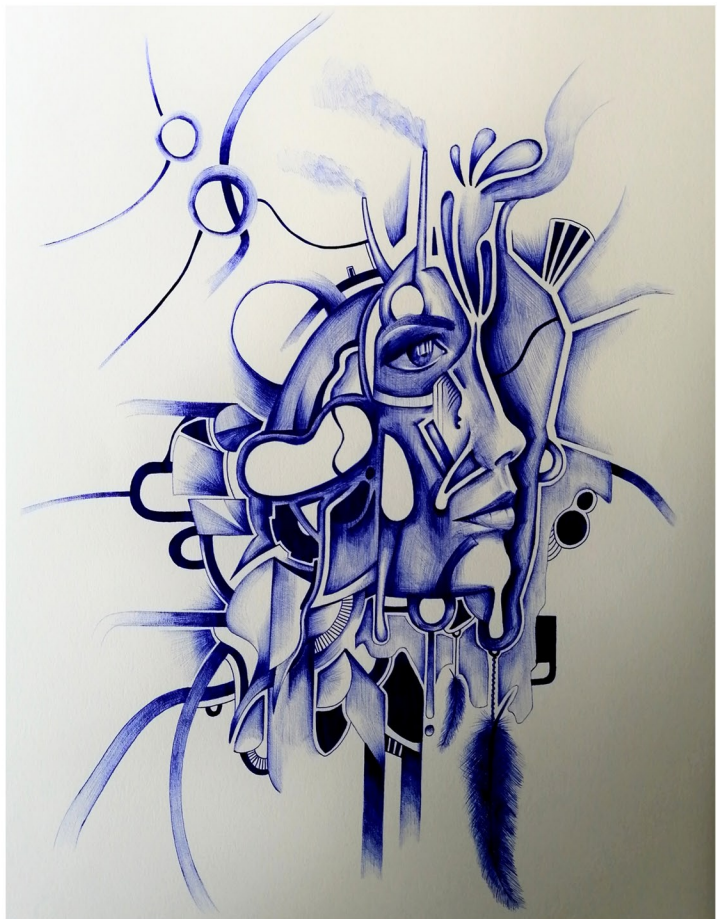


Image: "Blueprint of a Dream" by Jaundré van Breda. "Balancing Act" was written by Ajay Kumar for *Rattle's* Ekphrastic Challenge, July 2022, and selected as the Artist's Choice.

you are on your tiptoes to see your mother
in the ICU ward, her face in a heart of glass

made blue with nebulized breath, by confession
of the hospital floor in your eyes that the only nest

for a tired bird is air itself, cleaner than your conscience
that preferred her death over the fall again, and the fits.

a lone grain of dust coaxes from your eyes a confession
of unmasked water held back for some other occasion :

when she sleeps there is a nightmare sleeping there
in a way you cannot even dream of : how an hourglass

looks like a brittle polygon of infinity and infinity
appears to be a balancing act of two teardrops.

when she returns and looks at you : a breathingtube
for a nosering, a hospital gown the color of fadedgrass

that splits nakedbrown at the back : you knew you had to
oar her drained boat of a smile to some shore where
she won't lose herself to things you can't understand.

say she wants a hole on her body where nothing happens
say her drool melts her chin into a smudged feather

her flesh pricked like a legostrip that fits in then falls apart
for a new design : more what's broken than what broke it.