




In "Where the Water Meets the Sky" (page 200), New York artist Janine Antoni writes about how she walked the line between balance and imbalance on a tightrope. "Rather than promoting the myth of perfect balance, I would like to rethink our association of falling with failure," she says. Antoni, a visual artist, has exhibited at Los Angeles's Museum of Contemporary Art and New York City's Museum of Modern Art. "My next artwork will be a sculpture that incorporates a tightrope," says Antoni. "I am motivated by the inevitability of falling."

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Where the Water Me

A delicate
imbalance taught
JANINE ANTONI
everything she
knows about
balance.

PHOTOGRAPH BY JANINE ANTONI



ets the Sky

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BALANCE IS A FLEETING STATE WE'RE ALWAYS STRIVING TO MAINTAIN. THIS

thought came to me one day last year as I was learning to balance on a tightwire. In the beginning I believed that with practice I could develop perfect equilibrium. Instead I've grown more comfortable with the feeling of imbalance, and that has given me a useful way to understand my life. Rather than seeing balance as a perfect state, I have learned to trust the play between balance and imbalance. When I began, I tried to remain steady by an act of will, but the more I fought to keep my balance, the more I would sway. I found my balance when I was loose rather than rigid; movement became a kind of conversation between my body and the wire. If the wire meets my right foot a millimeter off-center, I can feel my left arm compensate instantly: Walking the wire is a lesson in interconnection. I also learned that breath and sight are essential to balance. In the same way that a ballerina focuses on one spot to perform her pirouettes, I must keep my eyes focused on the end of the rope. I learned to breathe out as I take each step, since it is nearly impossible to tense up on the exhalation.

Walking the tightwire has become a form of meditation for me. When my mind travels away from the wire, my body does also—and I fall. When my base of support is narrowed to a half inch of wire, I become more conscious of my surroundings. I experience a heightened sense of my body in space. Although I feel the pull of gravity more acutely, I must still project the illusion that I am walking on air.

Once I made this discovery, I began to think of other places where I might play out my fantasy of walking on air. The image at left is from a new artwork I call *Touch*, a video installation filmed at the seashore directly in front of my childhood home on the island of Grand Bahama. The ocean's horizon has been imprinted on my memory, a place where my imagination wandered for untold hours. I can hear my mother saying, "Janine, you must go out and see the world, because this place we come from is behind God's back." The horizon seemed to mark the edge between our forgotten island and the world out there. I had always thought of the horizon as a place that could not be pinpointed or in any way fixed; it is constantly receding. Still, I wanted to walk in this impossible place, to walk on the line of my vision, or along the edge of my imagination. In the video I enter from outside the frame, trying to walk where the water meets the sky. Around me nature plays itself out, unaware of my struggle. Under my weight, the wire dips to touch the horizon. I balance there for just a moment. •

"The ocean's horizon is imprinted on my memory," says Janine Antoni.