Kolam: the Art of Remembering

i

Every morning
diligently
as the koyals sing
summer heat into
transluence
and branches
wake up to
chameli fragrance
a village
begins its day
with women’s kolam
art
of geometric shapes
passed down
from mother
to daughter
the heritage of labyrinths
and mazes
Every morning
diligently
as the koyals sing
mothers and daughters
trace their journeys
back
to their source
and strength

I watch
my mother’s fingers
enveloped
in the giddiness
of creativity
in a game
of memory
Seventy some years
falling away
the pain of
rheumatoid
held at bay
for now
she is a young girl
writing
her life
into meaning.

Water washes away the dust
last night’s sleep
remnants of regrets
pain lingering in the corner
spider webs and ant trails
And then she begins
bent like the arc of light
with rice flour
pinched
between thumb and fore finger
in quick loops and lines
an old pattern
begins to seep into the ground
a white shadow
of ancestral song
scripted on earth
like footsteps
of gods
stepping
through her threshold.

iv

I pull out paper
after paper
after paper
and practice to trace
the old art into
the new art into
my fingertips
my nerves edged
with the thrill
of giving this blankness
shape
substance
meaning
while assiduously
my brain forges
a new encounter
with my body
and I am a dervish
dancing in whorls
of my several selves
becoming one

And on paper
after paper
after paper
    a
lotus
    blooms

She memorizes
the dots and grids
the curves
that scoop the universe
and bring it
to her feet
She remembers
destiny’s shape in
plantain leaves
stitched together
while prayers
robbed her

of words

She forgets

to loop around

a dot

and life becomes

for a moment

a maze.