

## Kevin Stein on: "A Step Away From Them"

Borrowing a line from the poem itself, one could easily call this an example of O'Hara's "I look" poems. His ostensible intention for the poem and its impetus, at least initially, are identical, and both seem purely visual. Still, amidst the glow of "neon in daylight" and the smoke of a sign, the "blonde chorus girl" and the "lady in foxes," time suddenly and sullenly rears its ugly head: O'Hara, dead center in "Times Square," becomes aware it is "12:40 of / a Thursday" (and he dates the poem 1956). He is made fitfully aware that time imposes limits. On the most mundane level, it brackets the exhilarating hour of his lunch, and in a larger way, brackets his own lifetime as it already has those of his deceased friends Bunny Lang and Jackson Pollock, of whom he thinks while walking on the "beautiful and warm" avenue before heading "back to work." Quickly, though his "heart" is in his "pocket," O'Hara moves from the death of his friends to safer, more objective matters such as "BULLFIGHT" posters and "papaya juice."

From "Everything the Opposite" in Jim Elledge, ed. Frank O'Hara: To Be True to a City. University of Michigan Press, 1990.

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