

Frank O'Hara, "Ode to Tanaquil Leclercq"

Smiling through my own memories of painful excitement your wide eyes
stare

and narrow like a lost forest of childhood stolen from gypsies
two eyes that are the sunset of

two knees

two wrists

two minds

and the extended philosophical column, when they conducted the dialogues
in distant Athens, rests on your two ribbon-wrapped hearts, white
credibly agile

flashing

scimitars of a city-state

where in the innocence of my watching had those ribbons become entangled
dragging me upward into lilac-colored ozone where I gasped
and you continued to smile as you dropped the bloody scarf of my life
from way up there, my neck hurt

you were always changing into something else
and always will be
always plumage, perfection's broken heart, wings

and wide eyes in which everything you do
repeats yourself simultaneously and simply
as a window 'gives' on something

it seems sometimes as if you were only breathing
and everything happened around you
because when you disappeared in the wings nothing was there
but the motion of some extraordinary happening I hadn't understood
the superb arc of a question, of a decision about death

because you are beautiful you are hunted
and with the courage of a vase
you refuse to become a deer or tree
and the world holds its breath
to see if you are there, and safe

are you? (CP, 363-4)