

O'Hara, On Seeing Larry Rivers' "Washington crossing the Delaware"

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On Seeing Larry Rivers' "Washington Crossing the Delaware" at the Museum of Modern Art

Frank O'Hara

Now that our hero has come back to us
in his white pants and we know his nose
trembling like a flag under fire,
we see the calm cold river is supporting
our forces, the beautiful history.

To be more revolutionary than a nun
is our desire, to be secular and intimate
as, when sighting a redcoat, you smile
and pull the trigger. Anxieties
and animosities, flaming and feeding

on theoretical considerations and
the jealous spiritualities of the abstract
the robot? they're smoke, billows above
the physical event. They have burned up.
See how free we are! as a nation of persons.

Dear father of our country, so alive
you must have lied incessantly to be
immediate, here are your bones crossed
on my breast like a rusty flintlock,
a pirate's flag, bravely specific

and ever so light in the misty glare
of a crossing by water in winter to a shore
other than that the bridge reaches for.
Don't shoot until, the white of freedom glinting
on your gun barrel, you see the general fear.

Larry Rivers, Washington Crossing the Delaware (1953)

Oil on canvas, approximately 7 feet x 9 feet. The Museum of Modern Art, New York City.

